

VOL. 107
ISSN 0032-6178



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

APRIL 2002



Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

April 2002

CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom	197	Avadhūta Upaniṣad	221
This Month..	198	Swami Atmapriyananda	
Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago ...	198	Glimpses of Holy Lives	223
Editorial: Whom Does God Help? ...	199	Swami Vivekananda—A Manager Extraordinaire	225
Charming the Divine by Music	204	Asim Chaudhuri	
Dr. Prema Nandakumar		Sri Ramakrishna's Attitude Towards Women	233
Why Do We Suffer?	207	Krishna Verma	
Pravrajika Sevaprana		Reviews	240
Religion and Life	213	Reports	244
Swami Bhuteshananda			
Lessons of History	215		
Prof M Ram Murthy			

Visit us at: www.advaitaonline.com for a free internet edition

Editorial Office:
Prabuddha Bharata
P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat
Dt. Champawat 262 524, Uttaranchal
E-mail: p-b@indiatimes.com

Publication Office:
Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014
Phones: 91+33+2440898/2452383/2164000
Fax: 2450050 • E-mail: pb@advaitaonline.com

Cover: Swami Vivekananda's Temple at Ramakrishna Math, Belur



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 107

APRIL 2002

No. 4

Traditional Wisdom

THE DIVINITY WITHIN

अदृष्टो द्रष्टा, अश्रुतः श्रोता, अमतो मन्ता, अविज्ञातो विज्ञाता; नान्योऽतोऽस्ति द्रष्टा, नान्योऽतोऽस्ति श्रोता, नान्योऽतोऽस्ति मन्ता, नान्योऽतोऽस्ति विज्ञाता, एष त आत्मान्तर्याम्यमृतः ... ॥

He is never seen but is the Seer, He is never heard but is the Hearer, He is never thought of but is the Thinker, He is never known but is the Knower. There is no other witness but Him, no other hearer but Him, no other thinker but Him, no other knower but Him. He is the Inner Controller, your own immortal Self. (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 3.7.23)

ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।
भ्रामयन्सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ॥

The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna. By His maya He causes them to revolve as though mounted on a machine. (*Bhagavadgītā*, 18.61)

ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः ।
मनः षष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ॥

An eternal portion of Myself, having become a living soul in the world of living beings, draws to itself the five senses, with the mind as the sixth, which abide in Prakriti. (*Bhagavadgita*, 15.7)

Water and the bubble on it are one and the same. The bubble has its birth in the water, floats on it, and is ultimately resolved into it. So also the *jivatman* and the *paramatman* are one and the same, the difference between them being only one of degree. For, one is finite and limited while the other is infinite; one is dependent while the other is independent. (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 33)

Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. (*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 196)

This Month

This month's editorial 'Whom Does God Help?' examines the two answers: Those who help themselves, and those who don't.

'Charming the Divine by Music' is a brilliant piece of devotion from Srivaishnava literature. The author, Dr Prema Nandakumar, is an eminent literary critic, translator and independent researcher. With over 25 books to her credit, including *A Study of Savitri*, she also writes fiction in Tamil and English.

In her two-part article 'Why Do We Suffer?' Pravrajika Sevaprana from Vedanta Society of Northern California makes a lucid presentation of suffering—its cause and cure—based on the teachings of the Buddha, Swami Vivekananda and other saints.

Under 'Religion and Life' we present the spontaneous responses from Srmat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj (twelfth President of the Ramakrishna Order) to devotees' queries and doubts. His recorded answers—and the subsequent transcript—have his approval.

In his article 'Lessons of History' Prof M Ram Murty discusses three important lessons history holds for us. He is currently Queen's National Scholar and Professor of Mathematics at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. The present article is the text of his talk at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Boston in February 1999.

Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math, presents his translation of the 'Avadhūta Upaniṣad', another important minor Upanishad under Sannyasa Upanishads. The elaborate notes are based on the commentary by Upanishad Brahmayogin.

Periyazhwar and Sridhara Swamin are the subjects of discussion under 'Glimpses of Holy Lives'.

Swami Vivekananda's was a multifaceted personality. Various are the ways he is viewed by people. In his brilliant and well-argued article 'Swami Vivekananda—A Manager Extraordinaire' Sri Asim Chaudhuri presents Swamiji as a manager par excellence. The author is a Six Sigma Black Belt professional with Caterpillar Inc, a multinational corporation based in Peoria, Illinois, USA. His recent book *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago: New Findings* is published by Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

In 'Sri Ramakrishna's Attitude towards Women' Smt Krishna Verma dispels the possible myth that the Master was a women hater. She analyses his relationship with his mother and other women including his women disciples, socially outcast women and his wife Sri Sarada Devi, an embodiment of purity. The author was a lecturer in philosophy in Indraprastha College for Women, New Delhi.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

DUTY

The increasing light shed upon the tenets of ancient Hinduism by the researches of orientalists has tended to dispel the misconception that Hinduism is a religion which preaches asceticism only; that it offers no attraction or consolation to the man of the world whose end and aim in life is to live and die in the honest performance of his duty. The *Bhagavadgita* which probably contains the quintessence of the entire teachings of Hinduism, is a discourse addressed to the man of the world, to Arjuna the warrior, having for its professed object his deliverance from the ignorance which made him resolve to shirk his appointed duty under the false notion that the slaying of his kinsmen was sinful. Apart from the *Bhagavadgita* the many religious books of the Hindus abound with stories and incidents illustrative of the same central idea that the path of duty is the way to deliverance.

—from the article by K Gopalan Nair, April 1902

Whom Does God Help?

EDITORIAL

When Arjuna and Duryodhana approached Sri Krishna for help in the Mahabharata war, the Lord said he would give his mighty army to one and Himself to the other—but He would Himself not fight. Arjuna chose the Lord and Duryodhana His army. And we know who won the war. So undoubtedly, it is good to have the Lord on our side and be helped by Him.

But how do we do that? By helping ourselves or by not helping ourselves? ‘God helps those who do not help themselves’ is very true indeed. That’s about absolute self-surrender. But is self-surrender so easy? What are the qualifications to be helped by God without helping ourselves? Let us hear the Lord Himself: ‘Those who worship Me, meditating on their identity with Me and ever devoted to Me—to them I carry what they lack and for them I preserve what they already have.’¹ Only a knower of God can fully meet these criteria. Most of us need to help ourselves, and that includes turning to God for help.

God’s Help for What?

Life in the world is beset with uncertainties and problems. People seek God’s help to face challenges in life, to be cured of diseases—physical and mental—or to gain worldly prosperity: name, fame, power, position, and success in an undertaking.

And God does help such seekers also. Famous temples where tens of thousands of devotees congregate with votive offerings bear witness to this. God considers such worshippers too as noble,² since they remember Him in the process. They seek God’s help, though for worldly things.

Though there is an apparent spiritual veneer to such devotion, we need to remember that it is after all seeking God’s help for

worldly pursuits—something not to make a song about. Swami Vivekananda cautions that it is very good to be born in a church, but it is very bad to die there.³ We cannot afford to be babies in religion all our life. Swamiji’s incisive words expose the spiritual veneer for what it is worth: ‘When the world is the end and God the means to attain that end, that is material. When God is the end and the world is only the means to attain that end, spirituality has begun’ (6.66). If we are serious about religion, these words deserve our careful and serious consideration.

However, there is a valuable by-product in seeking God’s help for worldly things: besides material prosperity or cure from diseases, prayer to God for worldly help leaves an impression in the mind, which deepens with repeated seeking. In due course this deepened impression makes the seeking natural at the habit level. This habit of seeking God’s help becomes helpful when a person is through with the things of the world and looks for something beyond.

According to Vedanta the world is a bundle of contradictions and pairs of opposites. No unmixed happiness is possible in the world. Fed up with the world and its problems some people look forward to a heaven in afterlife, consisting of only happiness unadulterated with misery. They naturally seek God’s help for such a possibility. But we need to remember that heavenly life—even if one of unbridled sense enjoyment—is not permanent. The moment one’s fund of meritorious actions is depleted, one needs to return to the earth to continue one’s journey to perfection.⁴

People who understand the futility of aspiring after heaven, and are through with the world’s enjoyments, begin to appreciate Sri Krishna’s words: ‘Having come to this transi-

tory and miserable world, worship Me' (9.33). They look forward to something beyond, and approach God for help in search of something eternal in the midst of transitory things. The seeking habit ingrained in their mind comes to their help now. Spiritual life can be said to begin at this stage.

Thus it is important to be clear about why we need God—to help us in the centrifugal (outward) journey to the world or in the centripetal (inward) journey to God Himself! Of course, one cannot wait for one's worldly duties to be over to turn to God. That would be 'as foolish as trying to bathe in the ocean after the waves have subsided'. Sri Ramakrishna advises us to hold on to God with one hand and perform our actions with the other. When the action is over, we should hold on to God with both the hands. What is meant is to try to remember God as far as possible in the midst of one's work, and offer the fruits of actions to Him.

Is God Partial to Some?

When spiritual life is so laudable, why doesn't God endow us all with spiritual aspiration? Why does He make us go through these miserable experiences in the world? Is He favourable to some? Does He have some chosen few? In any case a partial and choosy God can never be worthy of worship.

Sri Krishna makes the point clear: 'I am equally disposed towards all. I have none to hate, none to love. Those who worship Me with devotion, however, are in Me and I in them' (9.29). In his commentary on this verse, Sri Sankaracharya cites the example of fire, which lends its warmth to one who is closer to it—not to those who are away from it.

Another important question is: God is the prime mover of our actions. Does it not mean that He inspires our bad actions too? Two important verses in the *Bhagavadgita* dispel this myth: 'The Lord does not create for the world either agency of action, or actions. Nor does He bring about union of actions with their results. It is Nature that does all this. The omni-

present Lord does not take on the sin or merit of any. Knowledge is veiled in ignorance and hence the mortals are deluded' (5.14-15).

These verses deserve our careful study and consideration. They condense in them, as it were, the teachings of Vedanta. They describe the position of God in relation to the universe. God is all blissful and perfect. Even a shadow of motive or partiality in Him would be contradictory to His nature. His mere proximity to Nature (Prakriti) is enough to cause it to act and ensure continuance of the play called this world. People are bound to Prakriti and follow its dictates as long as they identify themselves with nature—internal and external. When this identity ceases, they become free.

We are Responsible for Our Destiny

Our actions—physical and mental—leave their impressions (*samskaras*) on our mind. These impressions determine our station in life, the nature of our work, the work environment, the kind of spouse, boss, subordinates, children we are blessed with. Our present actions and thoughts in turn deepen the existing impressions or create fresh ones, augmenting the existing stock. These impressions, again, determine our afterlife. Yama's assistant Chitrugupta maintaining a database of our actions may be all right for people who cannot receive better ideas. According to Vedanta, however, the database is maintained and updated with subtle stenographic precision right in our own mental system called *chitta*, the storehouse of memories.

To resume our discussion. Are we then caught in an interminable chain of actions-thoughts-impressions? Is there no meaning for self-effort? Far from it. The Law of Karma doesn't make us fatalistic. On the other hand, it is a great motive power for action. It makes us assume responsibility for ourselves. If our past determines our present, it logically follows that our present efforts will determine our future. So we need to be careful about our present actions and thoughts—if we are con-

cerned about shaping our future. Swamiji's inspiring words underline this important point:

Therefore blame none for your own faults, stand upon your own feet, and take the whole responsibility upon yourselves. Say, 'This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone.' That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by someone else I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves. Therefore, make your own future. 'Let the dead past bury its dead.' The infinite future is before you, and you must always remember that *each word, thought, and deed, lays up a store for you and that as the bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon you like tigers, so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever.*⁵ [Emphasis added.]

So it is clear that we need to work, we need to help ourselves, since our future depends on our present efforts. Secondly, only those who move closer to the fire can feel its warmth. In other words, we need to 'unfurl the sails'. In the words of Swamiji,

The wind is blowing; those vessels whose sails are unfurled catch it, and go forward on their way, but those which have their sails furled do not catch the wind. Is that the fault of the wind? Is it the fault of the merciful Father, whose wind of mercy is blowing without ceasing, day and night, whose mercy knows no decay, is it His fault that some of us are happy and some unhappy? We make our own destiny.⁶

Self-effort Indispensable

When we are not clear about the importance of self-effort, there is the danger of *tamas* (inertia)—veiled as *sattva* (calmness)—taking us for a ride. The so-called God-will-take-care attitude is a result of improper understanding of the Law of Karma, and has inertia (*tamas*) for its source. The apparent calmness due to inaction belongs to the *tamasic* variety. The

path to *sattva* from *tamas* is essentially paved with *rajas*, intense activity and discipline. That is why Swamiji never tired of rousing his countrymen to action, asking them to shed the inertia born of centuries of slavish existence. A proper understanding and application of this truth—of having to pass through *rajas* to ascend to *sattva*—can bring about qualitative changes in the lives of people, in turn effecting a change in the national scenario. The *Bhagavadgita* rightly advocates raising oneself by one's own self.⁷ Though all activities originate from God, we need to be up and doing as long as we have a will of our own.

Secondly, the more we expend our efforts, the more strength shall we get—to do more. That's God helping those who help themselves. Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this point with a beautiful example:

Just as when a cow is tied to a post with a long tether, it can stand at a distance of one cubit from it or of the whole length of the rope, so it is with the free will of man. A man ties a cow with the idea 'Let her lie down, stand or move about wherever she wills within that area.' Similarly God has given man some power. And He has also given freedom to use as much of it as he likes and in any way. That is why man feels he is free. But the rope is fastened to the post. And mark this: If anyone prays to Him in all humility, He may remove him to another place and tie him there; or He may lengthen the tether or even remove it completely from his neck. ... If the practising of sadhana were in the hands of man, all would have undertaken it. But how is it that they can't? There is however, one thing: *He does not give one more power, if the little that is given is not properly used. This is why individual effort and perseverance are necessary.*⁸ [Emphasis added.]

Forms of Self-effort

In spiritual life self-effort could be of various types. The central idea is to struggle to loosen nature's grip on us and to move towards God—towards fire to get its warmth.

Teaching ourselves and hearing about our real nature: Swami Vivekananda held that weakness is the cause of sin and misery in the

world. He advocated filling the mind with noble thoughts and repeatedly thinking about them as a first step to rid ourselves of weakness:

Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them that they are all glorious children of immortality, even those who are the weakest in manifestation. Let positive, strong, helpful thoughts enter into their brains from very childhood. Lay yourselves open to these thoughts, and not to weakening and paralysing ones. Say to your own minds, 'I am He, I am He.' Let it ring day and night in your minds like a song, and at the point of death declare, 'I am He.' That is the Truth; the infinite strength of the world is yours. Drive out the superstition that has covered your minds. Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practise the Truth. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached.

Performing one's actions without being anxious about the results: This is the essence of the oft-quoted passage from the *Bhagavadgita*.¹⁰ The Lord teaches us to work without being unduly concerned about the results. We have seen that we need to exhaust whatever lies within our capacity, to merit God's help. We need to struggle with all the physical, mental and intellectual powers at our command, trying to practise remembrance of God. Sri Krishna's advice to Arjuna was 'Remember Me and fight.'¹¹ In everyday life too, people find some problems unsolvable even after they have put in all their efforts. It is then they find help coming from nowhere, resulting in a miraculous solution.

When someone asked a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order about Transcendental Meditation, he said he did not know much about Transcendental Meditation but could say something about 'dental meditation'. What was that? He was referring to Sri Ramakrishna's teaching to remember God in the midst of one's activities even as a person with toothache remembers it in the midst of his occupation.¹²

Spiritual practices and prayer: Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi repeat-

edly emphasized the efficacy of prayer as a spiritual discipline. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* he repeatedly advises us to pray for delight in repeating the Lord's name, freedom from the hold of sense objects, reduction of worldly activities, and remembrance of God. Holy Mother taught to pray for a discriminative intellect (*sadbuddhi*), and freedom from desires (*nirvasana*).

Establishing a relationship with God: Sri Ramakrishna advised aspirants to give a different turn to the mind and its tendencies. As long as we identify ourselves with the body, we are constitutionally compelled to worship God with a human form. Life in the world hinges around 'I' and 'mine'. A different turn to this possessiveness is possible by directing it to God, by establishing a relationship with Him and looking upon Him as one's own. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated in his own life that the mother-child relationship was the purest.

People for whom image worship or establishing a relationship is not palatable, will find new light in Swami Vivekananda's words. His words are as forthright as they are inspiring:

Going after things of the senses has made us human beings, and we are bound to worship personal beings, whatever we may say to the contrary. It is very easy to say 'Don't be personal'; but the same man who says so is generally most personal. His attachment for particular men and women is very strong; it does not leave him when they die, he wants to follow them beyond death. That is idolatry; it is the seed, the very cause of idolatry; and the cause being there it will come out in some form. Is it not better to have a personal attachment to an image of Christ or Buddha than to an ordinary man or woman? In the West, people say that it is bad to kneel before images, but they can kneel before a woman, and say, 'You are my life, the light of my eyes, my soul.' That is worse idolatry. What is this talk about my soul, my life? It will soon go away. It is only sense-attachment. It is selfish love covered by a mass of flowers. Poets give it a good name and throw lavender-water and all sorts of attractive things over it. Is it not better to

kneel before a statue of Buddha or the Jina conqueror and say, 'Thou art my life'? I would rather do that.¹³

Self-surrender

As for the practice of total self-surrender, it is good to know that it refers to a very high state. Swami Turiyanandaji, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, describes it:

Self-surrender means: To practise contentment by thinking that wherever the Lord keeps me is for my good; to unify one's will with the will of God; and to practise even-mindedness in happiness and misery, gain and loss, and so on. In other words, one can surrender oneself completely only after liberation. Before that one will have to practise yoga repeatedly. Real resignation to God is liberation. If a person practises this attitude of resignation sincerely and wholeheartedly, he attains liberation by God's grace.¹⁴

Secondly, self-surrender is possible only when one has exhausted one's self-efforts and understood their futility. Self-efforts are necessary to 'tire the wings'. This relates to Sri Ramakrishna's following parable.

A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship anchored in the Ganges. Slowly the ship sailed out into the ocean. When the bird came to its senses, it could find no shore in any direction. It flew toward the north hoping to reach land; it went very far and grew very tired but could find no shore. What could it do? It returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After a long while the bird flew away again, this time toward the east. It couldn't find land in that direction either; everywhere it saw nothing but limitless ocean. Very tired, it again returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After resting a long while, the bird went toward the south, and then toward the west. When it found no sign of land in any direction, it came back and settled down on the mast. It did not leave the mast again, but sat there without making any further effort. It no longer felt restless or worried. Because it was free from worry, it made no further effort.¹⁵

However, it is important to know that self-surrender as a spiritual discipline—coupled with self-effort—can save us from rely-

ing too much on our puny self. It guards us from self-deception. That is because until the mind is properly trained and brought under control it doesn't begin to act as our friend. Though engaged in action, a spiritual aspirant tries to remember that it is God who is being worshipped through work: 'Whatever work I do, O Lord, is Thy worship.'¹⁶

* * *

To conclude. God helps those who help themselves. He also helps those who don't help themselves. The first statement refers to beginners in spiritual life. The second pertains to a fairly advanced stage. Both statements are true from two different standpoints. True self-surrender is possible only if preceded by intense self-effort. *

References

1. *Bhagavadgita*, 9.22. [Hereafter *Gita*.]
2. *ibid.*, 7.18.
3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), vol. 4, p. 42. [Hereafter CW, followed by volume and page numbers.]
4. *Gita*, 9.21.
5. CW, 2.225.
6. *ibid.*, 2.224.
7. *Gita*, 6.5.
8. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), p. 81.
9. CW, 2.87.
10. *Gita*, 2.47.
11. *ibid.*, 8.7.
12. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 605. [Hereafter *Gospel*.]
13. CW, 4.46.
14. *Spiritual Treasures—Letters of Swami Turiyananda*, trans. and ed. Swami Chetanananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), p. 67.
15. *Gospel*, p. 792.
16. *Sivamanasapuja*, 4.

Charming the Divine by Music

DR PREMA NANDAKUMAR

The *ekādaśī* is an important day for Indians. It is a day of fasting and there are several works which speak highly of the observation of an *ekādaśī* fast. The general legend concerning the *ekādaśī* fast deals with the worship of Lakshmi. Once a *vidyādhara* damsel had worshipped Lakshmi and received from the goddess the gift of a flower garland. When she met the sage Durvāsa immediately after, she offered the garland to him. Since Durvāsa felt that it would make a fine gift to the king of gods, he gave it to Indra. However, Indra in a moment of pride or self-forgetfulness placed it on the head of his elephant, Airāvata. The elephant threw the garland down and stamped on it. Enraged, Durvāsa cursed Indra, who lost all his riches. When on an *ekādaśī* day the gods churned the milky ocean, Lakshmi appeared. They worshipped Lakshmi and Vishnu, whose grace helped Indra regain his kingdom.

There are also different legends concerning particular *ekādaśīs*. The *kaiśiki ekādaśī* is associated with a musical mode—the *kaiśiki paṇ* ('verse', in Tamil). The *ekādaśī* commemorates one of the priceless gifts of *sanātana dharma* in the story of Nampāḍuvān ('Our Singer', in Tamil) that is said to have taken place in the temple of Tirukurungudi in south India. In a soft-spoken manner, with no frills, the tale unfolds the golden truth that one who is born in the lowliest caste can yet rise in spiritual stature by personal sadhana, and a high birth alone cannot guarantee heaven if a brahmin

chooses to stray from the right path. This tale of Nampāḍuvān is found in the *Varāha Purāṇa*.

The *Purāṇa* uses less than one hundred verses to tell the story. On the banks of Kṣira river near Mount Mahendra in south India, a devotee born in the *caṇḍāla* caste spent ten years singing at the gateway to the temple at Tirukurungudi, originally the *siddhāśrama* where Vishnu spent a while during the Vāmana incarnation. On a *śukla pakṣa dvādaśī* he sallied forth at dawn towards the temple with a lute in hand. While walking, he was caught by a *brahmarākṣasa* (evil spirit). Neither

If anyone reads or listens to this tale in Sanskrit, these words repeated more than a dozen times will definitely make an impression on his mind. Where words are kept under strict control and seek to understand the other's viewpoint, there is little chance for extremism to grow.

strong nor possessing the knowledge of Vedas to escape from the clutches of the evil one, the Dalit singer spoke softly to his tormentor praying for release. When there seemed no escape, the singer said: 'If it is ordained that I should become your feed, so be it. But I have been

following a good vow (*vrataṃ uttamam*) that consists of waking up the Lord (*jāgaram*). Let me go for this once so that I can fulfil the vow, and then return to you. Then you can eat me as you desire (*mām bhakṣaya yathepsitam*).'

The *brahmarākṣasa* replied that the singer might not return at all. Aren't there other pathways to go out, and other countries to emigrate? The singer said that though he was born in a lowly home, he had a good idea of what dharma is, and followed the path of truth. Like Bharata to Kausalya, the singer then enumerates several sins, and vows eighteen times that he will definitely return. Allowed to go, the singer completed his ritual singing and re-

turned to the *brahmarākṣasa*. On his way back, he was confronted by a handsome person who tried to reason with him not to sacrifice himself. However, the singer was firm in his commitment to the ghou. On his return he thanked the *brahmarākṣasa* for allowing him to go to the temple and sing to the Lord. The ghou was mystified and now requested the singer for the fruits of his music- *tapasyā* to relieve himself from the despicable state. The singer refused and preferred to give up his body rather than the gains of his *tapasyā*. He would rather allow his blood to be drunk rather than throw away the good that had accrued to his soul by singing the *kaiśiki* raga.

When the ghou fell at his feet and requested him to save him from hell, the singer wished to know what had brought him to this pass. The ghou said: 'I was Soma Śarma of Caraka *gotra* in my previous birth. I proceeded to perform a sacrifice (*yajña*) with the rituals and mantras used in a wrong manner. I performed the sacrifice just to make money. Because of that my family was accursed. Within five days of beginning the sacrifice, even before it was completed, I died. Because of the wrongful methodology I adopted in performing the sacrifice, I have been condemned to roam about as a ghou.'

The singer was overcome with compassion. He simply said: 'I happened to sing the *kaiśika* raga today (*yanmayā paścimaṁ gitam svaram kaiśikam uttamam*). May the power of the good received by singing it help you overcome your present evil state.'

The *brahmarākṣasa* was released from its evil body and was born again in a good family and spent his life as a great devotee. Nampāḍuvān also lived for a long time in Tirukurugudi singing the Lord's glory.

Reciting the *Kaiśika Purāṇa*, especially on *kārtika śuklapakṣa ekādaśī* is considered good for our soul. There are many reasons for this. Srivaishnavism prefers the *sāttvic* pathway in everyday life and this *Purāṇa* is truly a message of *sattva* qualities. Throughout the poem, the words '*madhuraṁ vākyam*' are repeated. Everyone uses sweet words to make their point clear. Nampāḍuvān, the *brahmarākṣasa* and the handsome person who met the singer on his way back speak in sweet terms. When the *brahmarākṣasa* opens with fierce words (*uvāca vacanaṁ ghoram*), the singer replies softly (*uvāca vacanaṁ mandam*) and henceforth the conversation is always kept at a civilized level. If anyone reads or listens to this tale in Sanskrit, these words repeated more than a dozen times will definitely make an impression on his mind. Where words are kept under

strict control and seek to understand the other's viewpoint, there is little chance for extremism to grow.

The other important lesson the *Purāṇa* holds for the listener is the value of self-discipline. The caste system can help man raise himself to higher states by sheer self-discipline.

A brahmin, for instance, goes beyond the pale of dharma if he barter Vedic knowledge for mere pelf. And one born in the hapless *caṇḍāla* caste can yet be transformed into an incorruptible *ācārya*. This approach has been a favourite with Srivaishnavism, that does not prevent anyone from gaining the grace of god. Each person has an appointed place and duty. If he seeks perfection in that state with a sense of surrender to the Divine, he becomes god-like. The Lord describes such a person of lowly caste precisely in such terms in the *Purāṇa*: handsome (*rūpavān*), good-charactered (*guṇavān*), pure (*śuddha*), one who knows all dharmas, has his place in

Such is the Indian clime where
the very heights of cultured living
has been attained under the
spiritual umbrella unfurled by
Srivaishnavism. ... With a past like
this that has lighted the torch of
integration so well, must we still
be lost in the maze of casteist
arrogance?

the heavens, and is verily an Indra. It was lack of such self-discipline imposed by the brahmin caste that led to Soma Śarma's terrible fate.

Emperor Krishnadeva Raya was drawn much to the story of Nampāḍuvān, and used two cantos of his Telugu epic *Āmukta Mālyada* to relate it. He brought in a poet's freedom to add colour to the telling. We see his singer Mālā Dāsari wearing a shirt made of skin, earrings made of brass and shaped like the conch and discus, carrying an umbrella of palm leaves. He wears a quiver made of leather to hold arrows. A lute and cymbals in hand, he walks wearing a garland of tulsi leaves with *tirumaṇ* (sacred marks) painted on his forehead. Mālā Dāsari's life is full of humility, and then comes his meeting with the *brahmarākṣasa*. The arena is terrible to look at and the *brahmarākṣasa* is awesome in his dress of human skin and sacred thread made of human guts. The singer fights a losing battle with the *brahmarākṣasa* and his minions. But after a good deal of argument, he is allowed to go to temple to sing to the Lord. Mālā Dāsari comes back. When he refuses to part with the gifts gained by singing for the Lord, the ghoulish begs for his compassion.

Here Krishnadeva Raya takes a wide leap to the time of Rāmānuja. The ghoulish tells Dāsari that for a Srivaishnava, compassion is essential. Had not Rāmānuja announced the Secret for all people in spite of the curse of Tirukoṣṭiyūr Nambi? Was he not reborn as Śrī Ādivan Śaṭhakopa Jiyar who raised the Ahobila Math for spreading the teachings? Did not Vedānta Deśika, who worshipped Lord Hayagriva, indite one hundred works to explain Srivaishnavism and thus save mankind from ignorance? Here he was who knew all about future incarnations. Yet, he was cursed to remain in the shameful body. If Mālā Dāsari subscribed to the Vaishnava dharma of

charity, he must raise the fallen. The singer agrees to help the ghoulish. After redemption we see the ghoulish as an ideal Vaishnava:

'With a tuft of hair on his head, wearing a snow-white holy thread, sporting the twelve *tirumaṇ*s painted on his body, the brahmin appeared with a tulsi garland, proper garments and a water pot in his hand. He carried a copy of the *Dīvyā Prabandham* (*pāṇisatha dīvyā prabandha sampuṭi thoḍa*) and shone with *brahma tejas* like a flame rising from smoke.'

The king adds that following the custom of Vaishnava brahmins, Soma Śarma now saluted the singer. Saluting a *bhāgavata* (devotee) is most important. According to Vaishnavas, the Lord may forgive an insult directed at Him but will never forgive an insult to his devotees.

It is significant that Krishnadeva Raya chose to add the tale of Mālā Dāsari to the branch stories in his epic *Āmukta Mālyada*. The epic is also known as *Viṣṇucittiyam* because the poet has dealt with Periyāzhwār's life in detail. The emphasis is, of course, on the life of Godā Devī. Periyāzhwār, Godā Devī and Nampāḍuvān exemplify the ideal devotee described by the Lord in the opening verse of the *Varāha Purāṇa*: 'One who comes to Me in the early hours of dawn and sings with devotion, whether I hear or am lost in other thoughts, on the tales associated with me and yourself, for each syllable of those songs he gains a period of a thousand years and more in the great heavens.'

Such is the Indian clime where the very heights of cultured living has been attained under the spiritual umbrella unfurled by Srivaishnavism. The Puranic Nampāḍuvān has a historical counterpart in Māraner Nambi, renowned in Vaishnava hagiology. With a past like this that has lighted the torch of integration so well, must we still be lost in the maze of casteist arrogance? *

Why Do We Suffer?

PRAVRAJIKA SEVAPRANA

Why do we suffer? We see so much suffering in this world and much of it seems inexplicable. A child is born with a crippling illness. A good person loses his job or family. Wars and famines kill thousands. Is there any meaning or purpose for all this suffering? If one believes in a Personal God, then one might say that it is God's will that there be suffering in this world. But why would a beneficent God will such a thing? Can suffering somehow be transmuted into something positive and uplifting? Is there a way to end suffering? These are age old questions.

Actually the question, 'Why does suffering exist?', has been with us since man first began to think. It really doesn't have any answer. It's like asking, 'Why maya?', or 'Why is the world the way it is?' We don't know why; we just find ourselves in this situation. It is said that Swami Vivekananda once said, 'If I had been God, I would have created a better universe.' Sometimes we feel like that. Yet if we look at suffering we will see that it has some causes; and perhaps it does serve some purpose.

Suffering Inevitable

In Buddhism the first of the Four Noble Truths¹ is that life is suffering. All life knows sorrow. We are all caught in the web of suffering. Every embodied being, because it is *embodied*, has suffering. We all desire to be free from pain and have pleasure, yet we see in life that 'having' brings 'not having', joy brings sorrow, birth brings death, pleasure brings pain. All things bring their opposite with them. We keep somehow hoping that soon this will all be over, and then we will have only joy and no pain. We spend most of our time and energy simply trying to make our existence more comfortable, more pleasurable.

We want to be happy. But in the relative plane lasting happiness is not possible, because the relative world itself is a series of changes. We need to really understand this. If we understand our bondage, then a desire to be free will come.

Time, space and causation are all tied together with change, beginning and ending, life and death. We are not the same person we were even five minutes ago. Our cells are constantly dying and being reborn. Everything that has birth, also decays and dies. In the *Bhagavadgita*, Sri Krishna showed Arjuna His Universal Form, with a thousand arms and endless shapes, with numberless heads and flaming open mouths. Into the mouths all beings were rushing and being chewed up and destroyed. Sri Krishna said, 'I am mighty, world-destroying Time, now engaged in slaying these men.'² Even Arjuna the great warrior was awestruck and frightened to see this terrible form of Krishna.

Nothing stays the same. A *jiva*, a body-mind complex, is really just a series of changes; and Time, the all-consuming, is chewing up every one of us. Just like the warriors Arjuna saw, our bodies are stuck between the teeth of time. We all share this nature. It is said that a grieving woman whose son had just died came to Buddha for consolation. Buddha said to her, 'Just do this. Please bring me some mustard seed. But one thing, you must get the seed from a house where there has been no death.' The woman set out into the village to get the mustard seed. At each house when she asked the people for the seed they were very willing to give it to her. But when she asked them if there had been any death in their house, they all said, 'O yes. My wife died last year,' or 'my brother died some time back,' or 'my father died'—always

there had been a death in the family. She kept asking all day long, going from house to house; but always got the same answer. After several days she returned to Buddha and bowed at his feet. When she stood up somehow her grief had been to some small degree assuaged, because she realized that everyone had lost someone close to them. She realized that death was there for all beings. She became a spiritual aspirant. 'As I am, so are they; as they are, so am I; thus one should identify oneself with all that lives, and should not hurt any living being.'³

The Cause of Suffering

The second Noble Truth is that suffering has a cause or source. Sorrow is defined as distress caused by loss, affliction, disappointment or regret. When we are attached to something, we feel suffering when it changes. All

has need of me. I will go to him.' Everyone tried to dissuade him saying, 'You'll be killed. Don't go there.' But Buddha just smiled. When he approached the cave where Angulimala was living, Angulimala was very surprised. No one had ever dared to come so close before. He called out, 'Stop.' Buddha kept approaching him and said, 'I *have* stopped. It is you who have not.' Angulimala was shocked. No one ever dared to talk back to him. He rushed up to Buddha with his sword raised, but somehow the calm composure of Buddha's face stopped him. Buddha looked into his eyes and Angulimala's sword dropped to the ground. We don't know exactly what happened, but somehow Angulimala collapsed in tears at the feet of Buddha. Buddha sat down too. Angulimala asked him what he meant by saying he had stopped, but Angulimala had not. The Master smiled and said, 'I meant I had

A person established in Truth will see that disease, old age and death come to all beings. Many unsatisfactory experiences of life are natural, just part of the life cycle, so an advanced aspirant will not allow his mind to be distressed by them.

suffering has a cause. According to Buddhist and Vedantic thought, pain, mental or physical, is directly caused by karmic factors—the fruits of our past physical, verbal and mental actions. These factors impel us to take birth in a body, and cause us to experience pain. But when one lives a truly spiritual life even though there may be pain, one can live so that one is not distressed by it. One can live so that one doesn't build further painful karmas.

This reminds me of the story of Angulimala. Angulimala was a thief and murderer who lived at the time of Buddha. He had been terrifying the whole countryside. In fact he got his name, Angulimala, 'garland of fingers', because he used to wear the fingers of his victims in a garland around his neck. When Buddha came to the area and started teaching, he heard all about Angulimala. Buddha said, 'He

stopped doing harm to all beings, but you have not.' Angulimala was transformed, changed into a new person. He completely gave up his old ways and became a monk, a disciple of Buddha. But the story isn't over yet. Angulimala as a disciple went to beg for alms one day in the area. Of course the people around remembered him as the terrible murderer who had caused so much trouble. At first, they fled from him, but when they found he carried a begging bowl rather than a sword they got together in a group and began throwing stones at him. Many of them had lost family members to this man and they wanted revenge. Angulimala did not blame the villagers or protest for he knew what he had been. He saw their fear and hostility and felt only compassion for them. He remained calm although he was hurt badly. He managed to crawl back

bleeding to the feet of Buddha. His past karma had borne its fruit. He accepted it and met it with love. He built no new karma and his evil deeds were completely washed away. They say Angulimala attained the state of an arhat, an illumined soul.⁴

A person established in Truth will see that disease, old age and death come to all beings. Many unsatisfactory experiences of life are natural, just part of the life cycle, so an advanced aspirant will not allow his mind to be distressed by them. Or we may see suffering as a means of working out lessons we need to learn here, such as patience, forbearance and compassion. Often these painful things are our greatest teachers.

We are confused about things. We don't see them as they really are, so we suffer. Suffering also is caused by afflictive emotions. Because of our confusion we feel emotions such

suffering. 'I want this, I don't want that.' Swami Vivekananda says, 'What makes us miserable? The cause of all miseries from which we suffer is desire.'⁵ The secret is, if we really understand the cause of our suffering, we *can* let go of our attachment to pain-bringing actions. Selfishness is the cause of suffering. There is no other cause. We will not really be free from suffering until we discover that we are not separate little entities. We are united, already complete and whole. We don't need anything from outside to complete us.

According to Buddhist and Vedantic thought, all suffering is 'dependent arising', that is within the realm of causation and time. It comes because of change and is dependent on relationships between things, cause and effect. If we study the situation we see that even pleasures, because they change, carry the seeds of suffering in them. All beings desire to

Every time we get that tight, wringing, uncomfortable feeling inside, which we call suffering, it is because we want something, or we are trying to cling to something that is changing.

as obscuration, desire and hatred. These emotions are painful and lead us to more confusion, more actions which only increase our pain and suffering. Our constant desire for things, our attachment, and clinging to life, bring us in the end pain. We suffer when we cling to something which is about to change, or when we desire something that we cannot have. We suffer also when we are united with something we don't want. We should look into our own minds to see the truth of this. Every time we get that tight, wringing, uncomfortable feeling inside, which we call suffering, it is because we want something, or we are trying to cling to something that is changing. We are constantly reaching out for, trying to get or hold on to, something, grabbing and holding, trying to complete ourselves. If you honestly look into your own mind I think you will find, as I have, that this is true every time. It is the clinging, the attachment, that causes

be free from pain, both physical and mental. This is natural, but we don't know how to get real happiness. We keep looking for it out there. Every action brings reaction, and we are caught up in our actions, many of which only cause further pain. This is the nature of external, perceptual reality. It is also the nature of our mental reality. Within the realm of causation there will always be desire, grief and pain. Through the change of pleasures, their nature of suffering is revealed. The cause of our suffering is also revealed. Swamiji says,

We have bound ourselves by our own actions—we have thrown the network of our action around ourselves. We have set the law of causation in motion. We have set the wheel in motion and we are being crushed under it.⁶

If we look closely we will see that this is true.

Cessation of Suffering

The third Noble Truth is that there can be

a cessation of suffering. Because it does have a cause, sorrow can have an end. What a wonderful message! This is good news for us, what we have been wanting to hear all along. But what does it mean? Does it mean sitting in a cave all day away from things? No, there is no escape in just that. Disease, death and hunger will find one there also. Does it mean we can have only pleasure and no pain? Can we fix the world so that there is only happiness? No. It means real renunciation, giving up, letting go, going beyond this world. This may be done in a cave or in the midst of our actions. If pleasures carry the seeds of suffering in them, then they too must be given up. What is left then? Some sort of void, a frightening annihilation? No. We are seeking abiding happiness. Truth and Truth alone. All the sages tell us, Truth is blissful. 'The greater the renunciation, the greater the Bliss,'⁷ because our true nature is then revealed. It is said when one even touches that ground, that inner Truth, Bliss (ananda), wells up spontaneously. Then there is no have and have not. There the very question of suffering disappears like a dream.

If we believe that suffering can have an end, that we can wake up, then the next question arises immediately. What is the way to remove all sorrow?

The Solution

The fourth Noble Truth gives us the answer, the way out of suffering. In a nutshell it is the Eightfold Path:⁸ (1) Right understanding; (2) Right aspiration; (3) Right speech; (4) Right action or conduct; (5) Right livelihood; (6) Right effort; (7) Right mindfulness; and (8) Right meditation.

These are all spiritual practices. Through the Eightfold Path, according to Buddhism, suffering can be brought to an end. Vedanta also says through spiritual disciplines, self-effort and grace one can realize the Truth. Liberation is possible. According to Advaitic philosophy, one must follow the path of knowledge. One must realize directly, in a totally non-dualistic manner, the final nature of the

mind. This is the path of jnana. In Vedanta and some other religious traditions, even in some forms of Buddhism, another path, the path of bhakti, also is stressed. In this path with real faith and trust one seeks refuge in a Personal God. Whichever path we follow, we are seeking to be free from sorrow. In Vedanta we say, one must realize God, and this means giving up the little self. When one really lets go of things, sees them as they really are, or really takes refuge, immediately the heart is filled with bliss—because that is our true nature, free and pure.

Ignorance and Attachment the Root Cause

It is ignorance of our own true nature that causes the suffering. We are confused. We are identifying ourselves with other things and we are unwilling to let go of this identification. If someone asks us the question, 'Who are you?', we usually reply first with our name. If questioned further we might say, I am a man or a woman, or describe ourselves as young or old, tall or short, fat or thin—all descriptions of our body. Or one might say, 'I am Indian, Asian, or American,' or perhaps, 'I am a bus driver, farmer, student, doctor, nun, mother or husband.' All again descriptions of the body or actions, what we do. Is this really who we are? What does our name signify anyway, a bundle of past impressions riding around in a decaying body? Swami Vivekananda tells us, 'The greatest of all lies is that we are bodies.'⁹ 'Body is the name of a stream of matter continuously changing. Mind is the name of a stream of consciousness or thought continuously changing.'¹⁰ All these identities that we have given ourselves, bring us pain because we cling to them.

There is a story of a holy man and a king. Once a king called a holy man to him and asked to be taught the way to be free from sorrow. The sage went near a pillar and caught hold of it. Hugging it to himself he began to cry, 'Free me, free me.' The king was mystified. The next day the sage came again and held on to the pillar weeping and complaining

that he could not get free. The king decided that the sage must have gone crazy. This went on for several days. Finally the king had had enough. He decided that the sage had really gone off the deep end. The king said, 'For heaven's sake! You are free, just let go of the pillar.' The sage smiled and, letting go of the pillar, said, 'You too, O King, are already free.' We see in the *Vairagya Satakam*:

In enjoyment there is the fear of disease; in social position the fear of falling; in wealth the fear of hostile kings; in honour the fear of humiliation; in power the fear of enemies; in beauty the fear of old age; in scholarship the fear of opponents; in virtue the fear of scandal; in body the fear of death. Everything in the world is followed by fear, renunciation alone brings fearlessness.¹¹

All things bring attachment and fear of change or loss. Life on this external level is always painful and full of fear. But is there anything we can learn from it? Is there any way the suffering itself can be turned into an advantage? Many mystics and sages say that there is.

Inner Change through Suffering

Sometimes suffering or pain causes us to turn inward, to seek a way out of our afflictions. If everything in life is going smoothly, then we tend to think that things will just continue to be as they are, and we do not feel inclined to struggle. Buddha's father tried to keep him from seeing disease, old age or death, because he knew if Buddha saw them he would renounce the world.

In the *Mahabharata* there is a section where Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava brother, while in exile, comes to the edge of a lake in the forest and is questioned by a *yaksha* who is disguised as a crane. One of the questions is, 'What is the most wonderful thing on this earth?' The answer is, 'Every day people are dying around us, and yet men think that they will never die.'¹² We seem to lull ourselves to sleep here in the world. The world with its myriad colours and sounds is singing

us a lullaby. There was an old song, and one of the lines in it was, 'Wake me. Shake me. Don't let me sleep too long.'¹³ Sometimes a few blows, a few good kicks from the world, help us wake up. Do we remember that all beings including ourselves are in the process of dying at least physically? What does this mean for us? Swami Vivekananda says:

Do you see yourself that you have eyes? When others speak of the eyes, then you are reminded that you have got eyes. Again when dust or sand enters into them and sets up an irritation, then you feel quite well that you have eyes. Similarly the realization of the universal Atman which is inner than the innermost is not easily attained. Reading from scriptures or hearing from the lips of the preceptor, one has some idea of It, but when the hard lashes of the bitter sorrow and pain of the world make the heart sore, when on the death of one's near and dear relatives, man thinks himself helpless, when the impenetrable and insurmountable darkness about the future life agitates his mind, then does the Jiva pant for a realization of the Atman. Therefore is sorrow helpful to the knowledge of the Atman. ... He is a man who even when agitated by the sharp interaction of pleasure and pain is discriminating, and knowing them to be of an evanescent nature, becomes passionately devoted to the Atman.¹⁴

When buffeted by sorrows in this world of disease and death he is driven to desperation and helplessness, then he seeks refuge with someone, relying on whom he may feel safe. But where is that refuge to be found? The omnipresent Atman which depends on nothing else to support It. It is the only Refuge.¹⁵

Suffering itself can be the stimulus that urges a person onward to realization. Sometimes when one is really hurt in this world, say when someone we really love dies and we suffer grief, suddenly from within the heart a *real* cry goes out. 'I want something that cannot die, something that can never be taken away.' We seek satisfaction in the external world and again and again we suffer. Sometimes it can be this very suffering that causes us to turn inward, to search for fulfilment, for something higher that can never be taken away, that can

never die. Holy Mother says suffering is a blessing because it is a great teacher. She says:

Human birth is full of suffering and one has to endure everything patiently, taking the name of God. None, not even God in human form, can escape the sufferings of the body and mind. Even avatars, saints and sages have to undergo the ordeal of suffering for they take upon themselves the burden of sins ... of ordinary human beings and thereby sacrifice themselves for the good of humanity.¹⁶

Saints and avatars also experience pain and suffering but not for karmic reasons or to learn as we do. They take bodies to teach men, to show the way, to raise all mankind to a higher level. We are caught in karma because we always think of ourselves as doers. We act and there is always the idea of 'I am doing something' and an intention behind the action. Therefore there is always karma in it. And unfortunately it builds more karma. A truly illumined soul does not act in this fashion. The action flows through him or her without obstruction. This is what is meant by doing God's will. The action flows directly from the higher Reality without any idea of agent, without any obstruction or intent from a 'separate entity'. This higher Reality is the source of all action for the illumined soul. There is no obstruction to it.

Through suffering, through forbearance, a person often gains inner strength. It is a great austerity to bear suffering cheerfully, without complaint. Forbearance, *titiksha*, strengthens the will power. It is one of the great virtues. In some traditions, aspirants have actually intentionally sought out painful austerities and practices to strengthen their self-control. I am not advocating hair shirts or beds of nails. The middle path seems more reasonable. But when pain does come to us (and it will in this world), this suffering itself can be used as a spiritual practice. One of the swamis tells us, 'You probably would be surprised to learn that our greatest lessons are not learned through accomplishment, but rather by bearing futility with great endurance. There you

really gain the most. When outside there is nothing, when the body is weak, when even the mind is not contributing anything, except that it has this tremendous power of stability—then you really achieve something.'¹⁷

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* even disease and death are described as austerities. Death is described as the highest austerity, *paramam tapah*.¹⁸ We can learn from all things. They can be used to turn the mind inward, Godward. Everything that happens to a spiritual aspirant can be used in this way. If we take realization of God to be the ultimate goal, then everything that happens becomes a tool, an instrument, a way, to attain the goal.

(to be concluded)

References

1. Byles, *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, pp. 218-9. [Hereafter *Footprints*.]
2. *Bhagavadgita*, 11.32.
3. *Footprints*, pp. 96-7.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 144-51.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), vol. 2, p. 147. [Hereafter CW, followed by volume and page numbers.]
6. *ibid.*, 2.257.
7. Swami Akhandananda, *Service of God in Man* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1979), p. ?
8. *Footprints*, pp. 218-9.
9. CW, 2.279.
10. *ibid.*, p. 272.
11. Bhartrihari, *Vairagya Satakam*, verse 31.
12. CW, 2.93.
13. Song by the Grateful Dead, popular in the 1960s in San Francisco.
14. CW, 7.226-7.
15. *ibid.*, p. 192.
16. *Thus Spake Holy Mother*, comp. Swami Sudhasattwananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1953), pp. 73-4.
17. Excerpt from class on *Isa Upanishad* by Swami Asokananda.
18. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 5.11.1.

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

Who is a jivanmukta? Can one become a jivanmukta by performing sadhana?

The individual is living, yet he is liberated; such a person is called *jivanmukta*; it is not that he will be liberated after death. And one can become a *jivanmukta* by performing sadhana.

Is it not enough if we love the iṣṭa and the guru, Maharaj?

No, no! This is not the right type of love. The direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who have tasted what love is, know what it is to love God. What do others know? Where else do we find such living instances of love in recent times?

St Peter went to Rome to preach about Jesus Christ to the Romans, who did not accept Jesus. The Romans got angry and imprisoned St Peter. Some admirers, however, managed to get him released after much effort. They tried in several ways to convince Peter that he ought to leave the city immediately to save himself. What could Peter do but obey his benefactors? He fled. On the way, Peter was surprised to see Jesus going towards Rome. He asked him where he was going. Jesus replied calmly: 'To Rome. I offered my body once on the cross. I wish to do that again.' Peter understood that Christ did not want him to leave the city. So he returned and the Romans killed him!

This beautiful story impressed me very much. Sri Ramakrishna said that he wished to sacrifice his body again and again for the good of the world. Not once, mind you, but repeatedly!

We have received initiation, but live far away from our guru. How do we then serve him?

Call on God wherever you are. God is not

far away from you, is He? Service to God is service to the guru. To pray and repeat God's name is to really serve your guru.

What is the meaning of 'transcending body consciousness'? Is it really a state one can attain?

As long as we have the body, we are the doers. Since I am the doer, I alone am responsible for the fruits of my actions—good or bad. When I become totally dependent on Him, I shall understand that it is He who is doing everything; the idea of 'I am the doer' will not come up again. This is transcending the idea of body-identity. This state can be attained. When you understand that you are not the body, you have attained that state.

You said one day that if we have to follow an ideal, we should never compromise.

I did not say that you should never compromise. I only said it is not good to make compromises. You must know your mind and proceed accordingly. For instance, if you can do without protesting, do not protest. But never mentally grumble all the while.

You told us while speaking about meditation that we have to fight in the beginning. Do we really attain bliss after all this battle?

The first part of life is one of struggle. You must have faith. Without faith, your mind will never go towards God and if the mind does not go towards Him, you cannot enjoy His bliss. These two are proportional. It is said in the Upanishads that the Lord has made our senses go outwards and so we seek the world and its false glory. One rare individual in a million draws his senses inwards. How can we enjoy bliss if we do not become indrawn?

Someone came to a monk and told him he had no taste for religion: so what should he

do? The monk told him that success came through love and so he should love God. That man replied that he had no love for anything at all; that he did not love anybody in the world. Then the monk struck his fan forcefully on the ground and exclaimed: 'Don't you have even a fan to love!' The point is, the man was so apathetic. Love grows by its superimposition on things.

At times my mind is drawn to the things of the world. What shall I do then?

Pray, and discriminate. Discrimination will show you the truth. Many a time, because of our narrow outlook we cannot give up what we would like to. But practice will make us overcome old habits. However, it is not that easy. Without God's grace it is not possible. Sri Ramakrishna himself says: 'I sat down to meditate but could not meditate.' You see, Sri Ramakrishna says this! Can you imagine! So it is not all that easy. Try to understand Sri Ramakrishna's words deeply and you will get answers for all your doubts.

I have been visiting here regularly just to be in holy company. But I am not sure what I have gained in the process ...

As the disciple's mind becomes purer and purer, he begins to see the Divine in the guru to that extent. The guru is none other than *saccidānanda*. But that is not experienced easily. As much is your sadhana, so much is your experience. Your love for the guru too grows proportionately.

Do not think what you are getting is something ordinary—I mean holy company. You could have gone elsewhere just as the whole world does; you could have gone to cinemas and playgrounds. But you come here

with much difficulty. So do not think your efforts to be in holy company is something trifling.

It is said in the *Bhagavadgītā* (7.3) that, of the thousands and thousands of people, only one or two strive after realization. The thousands do not do that because they don't even have such an idea in the first place. As the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* says, God has made the senses outgoing, and so everyone is interested in the false universe outside. By great good fortune, a few withdraw their mind from the world and try to look within.

Maharaj, why don't desires leave us?

As long as there is the body, it will function according to its nature. God has told the mind: 'Come on now, go and live in the world.' What is the fault of the mind? If He once again recalls the mind, there will be respite from worldliness. Then the mind will begin to think of Him constantly.

Maharaj, what is your opinion of those whose charity is based on religious considerations?

I would like to illustrate my standpoint with a story. There was a Muslim devotee. He would tell whoever came to him: 'Repeat the name of Allah. If you do that you will get food here.' And he fed only those who repeated Allah's name. One day someone came to him for food and he asked him to repeat Allah's name. But the visitor wouldn't. So the Muslim refused to feed him. At night, the Muslim had a dream. Allah told him: 'He does not repeat My name even once, but I still feed him every day. And you could not feed him just once because he did not repeat My name!'

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

We cannot say God is gracious because He feeds us, for every father is bound to provide his children with food; but when He keeps us from going astray and holds us back from temptations, He is truly gracious.

—Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 204

Lessons of History

PROF M RAM MURTY

When great historians are asked what we learn from history, they say we learn nothing, that history tends to repeat itself, and humanity makes the same mistakes with mathematical regularity. This is because we never look back, we never reflect and ask ourselves the question 'What do we learn?' We don't ask it at the individual level, or at the community level. We don't ask it at the national or international levels either. This lack of reflection is really at the heart of the historian's lament.

In the compass of a short essay, it is difficult to cover such a vast topic with any justice. So this essay will be based on the lessons I have learned from history.

In the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, the teacher tells the students on the completion of their course: '*Svādhyāya pravacanābhyam na pramaḍitavyam*, Do not refrain from learning and teaching' (1.11.1). That is to say, always put the question: 'What do I learn from this?' The words *svādhyāya* and *pravacana* are often translated as 'study and teaching'. But *svādhyāya* is *sva* (self) plus *adhyāya* (study) meaning 'self-study' or 'learning'. Thus, in whatever we study, in whatever we experience, we can always ask this question: What do I learn? Our studies will then become more meaningful, more purposeful. This is the essence of introspection.

What is History?

So what is history? Is it the story of battles and wars, of pillage and conquest, of man's inhumanity to man, of meaningless dates and disconnected events? The way history is taught in our schools, it would certainly seem so. It is no wonder that such a study is disgusting.

Swami Vivekananda, in his famous speech 'The Future of India', says:

Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. ... If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopaedias are the Rishis.

To this, we might add the dangers of modern society. The Internet seems to have become a sort of divine oracle and everyone wants to consult it, often without thinking. The World Wide Web is an information superhighway all right. But there are also facts on

... every race and culture has produced men and women of noble character and we may learn from a careful study of their lives. Our life becomes richer and deeper by such study.

the Web placed by individuals often with vested interests. We should exercise great caution before accepting anything in the Internet as true. Whatever else, the Internet is certainly not a divine oracle.

'True education,' Swamiji defines, 'is the development of a faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently' (5.231). This is the systematic development of the mind. Elsewhere he says,

To me, the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I had to do my education over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts

at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument, I could collect facts at will (6.38).

Thus, the mind must be trained to 'will rightly and efficiently' before it can begin the study of anything. That perspective is, as I said at the beginning, from the vantage point of learning. What does the study mean to me? How do I grow by this study? What is it that I learn? How does it help me in my interpersonal relationships?

We are heirs to all the great thoughts of the past. We have inherited the spiritual wisdom of the saints and sages of all nations. Let us claim our inheritance and study the spiritual history of the world. Sri Krishna's teaching of karma yoga—working with a detached, loving, concerned attitude—will do me more good than knowing the date on which the Magna Carta was signed. Buddha's teaching

... people of exemplary character had many difficulties and bitter experiences in their life, which they overcame through a tremendous faith in themselves.

of the Total View (*Samyag-darśana*) and the Eightfold Path will steer me through the problems of life better than the knowledge of the origin and cause of the Hundred Years War. Christ's message of love and his Sermon on the Mount will guide us through troubled days better than learning by heart the rumbles and opinions of some tyrant politician.

I am reminded of a joke about a history examination. The question asked of the student was: 'Discuss the events and causes that led to the war of 1812.' The student drew a blank. Time was running out. So he wrote: 'Before the war of 1812, there was the war of 1811 and before that...' We really can't say he was wrong!

So the study of history should be meaningful to our life, must enlighten us, effect our moral and spiritual growth. In this endeavour,

the study of the lives and teachings of the saints and sages of the world is most uplifting.

Speaking of the 'The Great Teachers of the World', Swami Vivekananda said:

By studying the lives of these great Messengers, we find that each, as it were, was destined to play a part and a part only; that the harmony consists in the sum total, and not in one note. As in the life of races—no race is born to alone enjoy the world. None dare say so. Each race has a part to play in this divine harmony of nations. Each race has its mission to perform, its duty to fulfil. The sum total is the great harmony! (4.120-1).

This is perhaps the first lesson of history we should learn: every race and culture has produced men and women of noble character and we may learn from a careful study of their lives. Our life becomes richer and deeper by such study. No matter what we may say, we all need role models, examples, shining luminously in our consciousness, illumining the path of our life.

The Value of Study: To Awaken Faith in Oneself

When we study the lives of such great personalities, we find that our problems pale into insignificance. Our troubles and difficulties are nothing compared to the problems they had to wrestle with. By such study we get a fountain of inspiration, a meaning for our own existence and endeavour, and find that we too have a part to play in this drama of life. We begin to realize that if we are able to live a peaceable and prosperous life, it is because of the struggles and sacrifices of others who lived before us. We enjoy certain civil liberties today because someone had a dream and sacrificed his life for that dream.

'I have a dream.' Those words still echo in our consciousness from the Corinthian pillars of the Lincoln Memorial. Even to visualize the scene that happened less than forty years ago is electrifying. We can still hear those words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr: 'I have a dream. ... Let us not wallow in the valley of

despair. ... even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. ... I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream ...'

These words awaken in us a deep sense of gratitude. Thinking about them, reflecting on these struggles, we can try to establish a mutual spiritual kinship. We are part of that struggle. We are part of the whole. Thus, history is not in the past. It is around us in the living present. Only we need eyes to see.

An intelligent study of history arouses in us a sense of enthusiasm, faith in ourselves. Says Swami Vivekananda:

Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves. Born with the consciousness that they were to be great, they became great. Let a man go down as low as possible; there must come a time when out of sheer desperation he will take an upward curve and will learn to have faith in himself. ... We can see that all the difference between man and man is owing to the existence or non-existence of faith in himself. Faith in ourselves will do everything. I have experienced it in my own life, and am still doing so; and as I grow older that faith is becoming stronger and stronger. ... The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself (2.301).

The second lesson of history is that people of exemplary character had many difficulties and bitter experiences in their life, which they overcame through a tremendous faith in themselves. We find them almost superhuman. These examples inspire us, for in them we see that it is through struggles, through failures and errors, that spiritual giants have arisen.

To cite a humorous case, Mahatma Gandhi describes how in his student days, training for the legal profession, he was required to at-

tend the proceedings at Bombay High Court. In his autobiography, Gandhi writes:

I used to attend High Court daily whilst in Bombay, but I cannot say that I learnt anything there. I had not sufficient knowledge to learn much. Often I could not follow the cases and dozed off. There were others also who kept me company in this, and thus lightened my load of shame. After a time, I even lost the sense of shame, as I learnt to think that it was fashionable to doze in the High Court.²

We know how, despite such sloppy study habits, Gandhi later disciplined himself and became a moral and spiritual giant inspiring others by his example.

In *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* we find him saying that he ought to receive eternal damnation for all the sins of his youth. Yet, he transformed his character, changed his habits, and through the power of prayer became a spiritual giant whose writings influ-

... nations and civilizations grow through the self-discipline and spiritual evolution of a few creative and original individuals.

enced the growth of Christianity for at least five centuries. Augustine would pray, 'Too narrow is the house of my soul for You to enter into it; let it be enlarged by You. It lies in ruins; please build it up again. ... Who else can I call upon than You?'

On the theme of growth through errors, Swami Vivekananda says in his lecture 'The Great Teachers of the World':

Let us think something new, even if it be wrong. It is better to do that. ... We become wiser through failures. ... Look at the wall. Did the wall ever tell a lie? It is always the wall. Man tells a lie—and becomes a god too. ... The people who never think anything for themselves are not yet born into the world of religion; they have a mere jelly-fish existence.³

We should not regret our mistakes; rather we should learn from them. Failures are

stepping-stones for our spiritual growth, says Swami Vivekananda. If that be the case, let us pile them high and climb up to those celestial summits.

Originality in Historical Solutions

The third lesson of history is that nations and civilizations grow through the self-discipline and spiritual evolution of a few creative and original individuals. We find them often retreating into profound introspection, into a deep analysis of their past, with a serious discontent with the present condition of society and a passionate yearning to find a way out. We find this in the lives of Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Sankaracharya, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

For example, in Buddha's life, we learn how he was struck by the misery of the world, though being born a prince and brought up in the lap of luxury. He could not find comfort in personal happiness, and renounced his princely life and wandered into the forest in search of a way out of human misery. There, sitting under the bo tree and vowing not to get up until he had found the solution, he attained enlightenment and taught the world the Eightfold Path.

Six hundred years before Christ, Buddha travelled in India teaching people how to liberate themselves from misery, how to get rid of craving, selfishness and superstition. Swami Vivekananda writes of Buddha:

... consider his marvellous brain! No emotionalism. That giant brain never was superstitious. Believe not because an old manuscript has been produced, because it has been handed down to you from your forefathers, because your friends want you to—but think for yourself; search out truth for yourself, realize it yourself. ... One has to have a mind that is crystal clear; only then can truth shine in it.⁴

That a man who lived almost 3000 years ago can touch us, influence and inspire us, is a remarkable fact. It is because of the power of his *tapasyā*, the depth of his meditation and introspection. He was not satisfied with superfi-

cial solutions. He went to the heart of the problem and found the way out. That is why millions around the world worship him. He taught us self-reliance, how to think for ourselves.

When we come to the life of Jesus 600 years later, we do not have any record of his austerities or spiritual practices. But we have his spiritual teachings as handed down to us in the Sermon on the Mount. 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.' Purify the mind and heart and you will find God.

The hands of Jesus have touched many lives and transformed them across the vast stretches of time. In all such transformed lives, we find a deep questioning, a profound introspection, to penetrate into the heart of things.

To cite an example of recent times, Mahatma Gandhi writes of his first encounter with Christian teachings:

... one of the Plymouth Brethren confronted me with an argument for which I was not prepared:

'Sin we must. It is impossible to live in this world sinless. And therefore Jesus suffered and atoned for all the sins of mankind. Only he who accepts His great redemption can have eternal peace.'

The argument utterly failed to convince me. I humbly replied:

'If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians, I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin.'⁵

It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. My reason was not ready to believe literally that Jesus by his death and by his blood redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically there might be some truth in it. ... I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born (p. 113).

We find the same introspective conflict in

the life of Martin Luther King Jr. He lived only forty years ago. Born as a son of a Christian preacher, and himself a preacher, he could not resolve the contradictions of the teachings, the contradictions in life and in society. In his *Autobiography*, he writes:

I guess I accepted biblical studies uncritically until I was about 12 years old. But this uncritical attitude could not last long, for it was contrary to the very nature of my being. I had always been the questioning and precocious type. At 13, I shocked my Sunday School by denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Doubts began to spring forth unrelentingly. ... My parents would always tell me that I should not hate the white man, but that it was my duty as a Christian to love him. The question arose in my mind: how could I love a race of people who hated me? ... This was the great question for a number of years.⁶

He didn't stop there and accept the state of things. Combining intellectual studies with critical inquiry and a spiritual introspection, he evolved a personal philosophy of effective action. He wrote:

... I despaired about the power of love in solving social problems. I felt the Christian ethic of love was confined to individual relationships. I could not see how it could work in social conflict ... until I heard about Mahatma Gandhi. ... As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism about the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. ... Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale.⁷

The philosophy of non-violent resistance of evil as embodied in the lives of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr can also be applied in dealing with our own turbulent inner condition. Sometimes confronting our shortcomings head on is perhaps the wrong thing to do. It only strengthens them even more. When Swami Turiyananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, asked his master how to free oneself completely from lust, Sri Ramakrishna re-

plied: 'Why should it go, my boy? Give it a turn in another direction.'⁸ That is the secret. This is really non-violence, non-cooperation with evil. We give our energies, our aspirations and our desires a spiritual turn. We engage them in a constructive and creative direction.

To recap, there are three main lessons of history. The first is that all nations and races have produced men and women of exalted character and we can learn from a serious study of their lives and teachings. Since time is short, their lives are the only thing worth studying. The second is that each of these noble individuals had tremendous faith in themselves that they could transform themselves and that they could make a difference. Third, they followed this up by intense yearning, deep introspection and fiery *tapasyā*. And out of that came their life's work.

No system can make us. We have to make ourselves. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find this intense yearning and *tapasyā*. He had tremendous faith in himself. He always regarded himself as a child of God, a child of the Divine Mother. In his life, we see him ever eager to learn from everyone. 'As long as I live so long do I learn,' he would say. We see him practising the spiritual disciplines of all major religions, not academically as we tend to, but plunging into them headlong, forgetting his traditional past and merging into the spiritual ideals represented by those religions. Thus he realized the harmony of all religions.

This attitude of taking a total view, a holistic view, is even more important today than it ever was because we stand on the precipice overlooking the valley of self-destruction. For this is the age of specialization, where each of us knows more and more about less and less, with none of us having a global view. Today, we are about to put our future in the hands of computers. The society we have created is so fragile that if one plug is pulled, if one microchip fails to work properly, society comes to a standstill and we are all in the dark—literally.

Instead of technology being our servant,

we have become its servants. Fifty years ago, it was said that science would give humanity the leisure to contemplate, to meditate and grow spiritually. Actually the opposite has happened. Technology appears to have taken away the leisure we had and filled it with more work. How many of us bring our work home! Now that we are connected through the computer, our weekends and evenings are spent replying to e-mail and so forth. Science has unleashed its power without giving us the wisdom to use that wisely, to control it, to channel its use.

As a child, I remember reading the mythological story of Matsya avatara, the fish incarnation, and Hayagriva, a demon who had the body of a human being but the head of a horse. The demon steals the Vedas from Brahma, the Creator. Then Vishnu incarnates as the giant fish and deluges the world to restore the Vedas to Brahma. Hayagriva is the human being who has not outgrown his animal tendencies and is a symbol of the modern man, dangerously armed with technology.

After completing his encyclopaedic study of world history, Arnold Toynbee says,

In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. ... At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. ... Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions: here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family—and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

Yet even the strongest and most respectable utilitarian motive is only a secondary reason for taking Ramakrishna's and Gandhi's ... teaching to heart and acting on it. The primary reason is that this teaching is right—and is right because it flows from a true vision of spiritual reality.⁹

Thus, it is not by conquest and competition that peace is secured but rather through the spirit of cooperation and understanding.

Looking at history, we see that empire after empire has fallen as if testifying that conquest has never brought about unity. Only the spiritual empires of the world's saints and sages with their message of love and harmony are intact. It is for us to take it up and practise it in our lives. Says Swami Vivekananda:

The more I study history, the more I find that idea [of competition] to be wrong. Some say that if man did not fight with man, he would not progress. I also used to think so; but I find now that every war has thrown back human progress by fifty years instead of hurrying it forwards. The day will come when men will study history from a different light and find that competition is ... not necessary to evolution at all.¹⁰

Human society is an interdependent society. We can all progress through a spirit of cooperation. Our future depends on it. May we all imbibe the spirit of learning from all the saints and sages of the world and, imbued with faith in ourselves, dive deep into our own being. May we realize the interconnectedness of all life and live peacefully in a spirit of mutual cooperation. This is my prayer. *

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), vol. 3, p. 302. [Hereafter CW, followed by volume and page numbers.]
2. M K Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Mudranalaya, 1997), p. 80. [Hereafter *Story*.]
3. CW, 4.126-7.
4. *ibid.*, 8.104.
5. *Story*, pp. 103-4.
6. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, p. 7.
7. *ibid.*, pp. 23-4.
8. Swami Ritajananda, *Swami Turiyananda* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1973), p. 11.
9. 'Arnold Toynbee on Sri Ramakrishna' in *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture* (Madras: Vivekananda Rock Memorial Committee, 1970), p. xv.
10. CW, 5.278.

Avadhūta Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Synopsis

Belonging to the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*, this Upaniṣad describes the nature of an *avadhūta*—an all-renouncing ascetic of a high order—his exalted state or condition, his conduct in the world and his teaching about the Ultimate Truth.

Peace Chant¹

ॐ सह नाववतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहे । तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहे । ॐ शान्तिः
शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om. May He (the Supreme Spirit or Brahman) protect² us both³ [by illumining us about the real nature of knowledge]. May He protect us both [by revealing to us the fruits or application of this knowledge]. May we both strive together. May our learning be powerful and illuminative.⁴ May there be no disharmony between us. Om Peace, Peace, Peace!⁵

Inquiry into the nature of an *avadhūta*

अवधूतजिज्ञासा

अथ ह साङ्कृतिर्भगवन्तमवधूतं परिसमेत्य पप्रच्छ । भगवन् कोऽवधूतस्तस्य का स्थितिः किं लक्ष्म किं संसरणमिति । तं होवाच भगवो दत्तात्रेयः परमकारुणिकः ॥१॥

1. Well, then,⁶ Sāṅkṛti, having approached Bhagavān⁷ Dattātreya, the [venerable] *avadhūta*, questioned him [thus]: ‘Bhagavan! Who is an *avadhūta*? What is his state (or condition) [of existence]? What are his characteristics? How does he move about in the world?’ The supremely compassionate Bhagavān Dattātreya replied as follows:

Literal meaning of the word *āvadhūta*

अवधूतशब्दस्याक्षरार्थः

अक्षरत्वाद्वरेण्यत्वाद्भूतसंसारबन्धनात् ।

तत्त्वमस्यादिलक्ष्यत्वादवधूत इतीर्यते ॥२॥

2. The *avadhūta* is so called because he is immutable (imperishable) (*akṣara*); he is the most illustrious (or the most worthy [of worship]) (*vareṇya*); he has shaken off [all] worldly bondages (*dhūta-saṁsāra-bandhana*); and he is the implied meaning of [the identity dicta like] *tat-tvaṁ-asī* (That thou art) etc (*tattvamaśyādi lakṣya*).⁸

Definition of an *avadhūta*

गौणावधूतचर्या

यो विलङ्घ्याश्रमान्वर्णनात्मन्येव स्थितः सदा ।

अतिवर्णाश्रमी योगी अवधूतः स कथ्यते ॥३॥

3. He who is always poised in his own Self after having crossed the [barriers of] stages in life

and society (*āśramas*) and the castes (*varṇas*), and has thus gone beyond the *varṇāśramas* [distinctions], such a yogin (one who has achieved union with God or the Supreme Reality) is said to be an *avadhūta*.⁹

(to be continued)

Notes

1. Chanted by the teacher and the student at the beginning of the study (*vidyārambha*).
2. The translation follows 's interpretation in his commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. The word 'protect' occurs twice in the first two sentences. Śaṅkara interprets the first as protecting by illuminating the mind with an understanding of the real nature of knowledge (*vidyā-svarūpa-prakāśanena*), and the second as protecting by revealing the fruits of knowledge (*vidyā-phala-prakāśanena*). In modern terms, we may say that the first is the science of knowledge, while the second is the technology.
3. 'Both' means the preceptor (*guru* or *ācārya*) and the disciple or student (*śiṣya* or *vidyārthi*).
4. The word used in the original is *tejas*. Śaṅkara interprets it as strength. It is interesting to see how the Upaniṣadic sages wanted education and learning to endow one with strength of character.
5. The repetition of the word 'Peace' thrice is to ward off the three kinds of misery (*duḥkha-traya*): (i) *ādhibhautika* (misery due to beings, say wild animals, serpents, cruel humans, etc); (ii) *ādhidaiivika* (misery due to natural calamities like earthquakes and floods, which are ordinarily beyond our control); (iii) *ādhyatmika* (misery relating to one's own body and mind, that is to say physical and mental illnesses). In order that *vidyā* or learning be effective, both the teacher and the taught ought to be free from all these three kinds of misery. Hence the word *śāntiḥ* ('Peace') is chanted thrice, to ward off the threefold misery.
6. The indeclinable participles *ha* and *vai* indicate recollection of some well-known past event.
7. *Bhagavan* is a word signifying spiritual wisdom bordering on omniscience, strength, prowess, illumination, godliness, etc.
8. Here the four syllables *a*, *va*, *dhū* and *ta* are taken separately as standing for *akṣara*, *vareṇya*, *dhūta-saṁsāra-bandhana* and *tattoamasyādi-lakṣaṇa*, respectively. The import of this analysis is that an *avadhūta*, one who has realized the Supreme Brahman, is very Brahman.
9. In the previous mantra, the profound meaning of the word *avadhūta* and hence an *avadhūta*'s real nature as one with Brahman were discussed. In this mantra, his place in society is described as being beyond caste, position and social status, for he is constantly in communion with the Supreme Self or Brahman.

Purity and impurity are nothing but differences in one's attitude. Attachment to sense objects is impurity, and attachment to God is purity. That which is real in human beings is God. Without God, man is nothing but a cage of flesh and bones. The consciousness in man is a part of God, and that is pure: everything else is impure. The good tendencies in man lead him towards God, and the bad tendencies keep him away from God. One can understand this gradually, but in the beginning of sadhana one should hear about it (p.130).

The Lord promised in the Gita, 'Proclaim it boldly, O son of Kunti, that my devotee never perishes.' You will experience the truth of the Lord's words when you watch your own mind. You will see how the Lord is slowly guiding you towards Him and how our spiritual thoughts are replacing worldly thoughts. When you reflect on this truth, your mind will automatically be filled with strength, zeal, faith and devotion (p.145).

—Swami Turiyananda, *Spiritual Treasures*

❧ Glimpses of Holy Lives ❧

He Blessed the Lord Himself!

Vishnuchitta was born in Srivilliputtur, and true to his name, had his mind (*chitta*) always immersed in the thoughts of Vishnu since his childhood. He derived joy from thinking of the Lord, hearing of His glories and listening to the *krishnavatara lilas* of the Lord. He had heard that Kamsa, the evil uncle of Sri Krishna, had a devoted attendant named Malakara, whose pastime was to string garlands for the Lord. Sri Krishna is said to have visited Malakara and asked for and wore with great pleasure the garlands strung by him.

Vishnuchitta would begin his day with the worship of the Lord. He would not eat anything before he finished the worship. Inspired by Malakara, Vishnuchitta made it a point to string and offer garlands for the Lord in Srivilliputtur temple. He grew a beautiful flower garden for this purpose. Offering floral garlands to the Lord became an important daily routine in Vishnuchitta's life.

The Pandiya king Vallabha Deva in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, was a just king, known for his righteousness and concern for his subjects' welfare. He had a doubt nagging him: 'There is no dearth of material comforts for me in this life. But what do I need to do for the hereafter? How to know the Supreme Truth in reality?' He discussed the problem with his *kulaguru*, family teacher. The guru said that only those who were endowed with thorough learning and a life based on that learning could give him a satisfactory answer. The king convened an assembly of pundits and instituted a reward of a purse of gold coins for the person who gave a satisfactory answer.

The Lord appeared to Vishnuchitta in a dream and informed him of the oncoming assembly. He commissioned him to go to Madurai, proclaim to the world through the assembly that Sriman Narayana alone is the

Supreme Truth, and win the gold purse. Vishnuchitta was dumbfounded and expressed diffidence: 'How can I, a half-learned person, announce this noble truth in the assembly?' Lord Vishnu promised to endow him with the required wisdom and bade him to proceed to Madurai.

The king received Vishnuchitta with due honour and requested him to show him the way to the Supreme Reality. By the grace of the Lord, Vishnuchitta could understand the truths hidden in the Vedas, the Agamas and the Puranas. He declared that the Vaishnava religion was the true and ancient religion, Vishnu the Supreme Truth, and surrender to Him alone was the only way for all. The king and the assembled pundits were spellbound by Vishnuchitta's wisdom and eloquence. Legend has it that the string fastening the purse of gold coins to the top of a post, snapped of itself and fell on the lap of Vishnuchitta.

Very much pleased, the king arranged for Vishnuchitta to be taken on a procession through the city on a caparisoned elephant. It is said that Lord Vishnu Himself came to witness the honour bestowed on his devotee. Beholding Him, Vishnuchitta was concerned that nothing untoward should happen to his beloved Lord and His beauty in that huge concourse of people! He burst into a hymn beginning with '*Pallandu ... pallayirattandu*, many years ... many thousands of years'. He blessed the Lord to live thousands of years with undiminished glory! This famous Tamil hymn is chanted even to this day in Vishnu temples and Srivaishnava homes in Tamil Nadu.

Vishnuchitta returned to his place, and out of the purse money built a tower (*gopuram*) for the Lord's temple in Srivilliputtur. Vishnuchitta came to be known as Periya ('senior' in Tamil) Azhwar since he blessed the Lord Himself to live for thousands of years!

The Descent of Divine Grace

It was sometime in the 10th or 11th century. A south Indian king and his minister were walking along a street discussing Divine Grace. The minister said, 'God's mercy totally transforms the person on whom it descends: a fool becomes wise, a sinner becomes a saint.' Call it coincidence or destiny, the king happened to spot a boy on the street carrying oil in a vessel riddled with holes. Turning to the minister, he asked, 'You mean to say even this fool can become wise?' 'Oh yes,' replied the minister. 'If God is gracious, why not?'

The king took it upon himself to test the truth of his minister's statement. He called the boy and enquired about his antecedents. The boy—his name was Sridhara—was born to brahmin parents and had lost both of them when he was still very young. Deprived of parental care he had grown into a rustic. All the same, his sincerity was evident. It impressed the king. He brought the boy to the palace and had him initiated into a mantra. And Sridhara, born pure, offered whole-hearted devotion and all his filial affection to his Chosen Deity, Lord Narasimha, and forgot everything else.

God helps those who have none to call their own. After some time the Lord appeared before Sridhara and granted him a boon: 'May all the wisdom of the Vedas be yours. May your pure heart be ever devoted to Me.'

Who can match the knowledge that is replenished at the Source of all knowledge. Reputed pundits came to regard Sridhara with awe. The king showered honours on him. Money was never a problem. And in course of time Sridhara married. But then, a person who has tasted divine bliss even once is not allured by the shallow joys of worldly life. Neither does God allow a true devotee to rest content with the trifles of the world. Sridhara's heart was panting for God. He wanted to give up everything so that he could devote himself en-

tirely to the one thing he considered worthwhile: striving for God-realization. Before long an opportunity presented itself.

Sridhara's wife died in childbirth. The tragedy hardly affected him; in fact he humbly accepted it as God's will. But the responsibility of having to care for the newborn—maybe at the cost of his spiritual life!—worried Sridhara. A real devotee that he was, he discriminated: 'The only duty of a human being is to realize God, and I have fallen prey to the delusion that I have to look after this infant. Each soul comes into this world driven by its past actions and experiences the result of its own karma. It is the Lord who provides for them all. Who am I?' Still, moral dilemmas can't be wished away. 'Which comes first? My responsibility towards myself as a human being, or my obligation to this baby as its father? As the baby's father, will I be justified in abandoning it at a time when it needs me most— even in the name of answering my highest calling? Can I do such a thing and still be moral?' Sridhara was unable to resolve the conflict about where his true responsibility lay.

He was pondering thus, when an egg dropped from the roof of his house and crashed on the ground before him. Luckily the fluids in the egg cushioned the impact and out came the little one, unhurt. Just then a tiny worm came crawling up as if just to get stuck up in the mess—right in front of the fledgeling, which opened its little beak and picked up the worm ... just like that.

That was it. Sridhara learnt his lesson. Trusting the baby to the hands of Providence, he renounced the world forthwith and went away to Varanasi.

Sridhara, the hero of our story, later became Acharya Sridhara Swamin famous for his great commentaries on the *Bhagavadgita*, *Bhagavata* and *Vishnu Purana*.

[Holy company] begets yearning for God. ... By constantly living in the company of holy men, the soul becomes restless for God.

—*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 96

Swami Vivekananda—A Manager Extraordinaire

ASIM CHAUDHURI

Swami Vivekananda has been called a spiritual leader, prophet, social reformer, nationalist, philosopher, yogi, writer, orator, educationist, and so on. But has he been called a manager? Nowhere in the literature have I come across his being specifically depicted as one, although, in addition to all those above, he was truly a manager, or more appropriately a leader-manager.

One thing should be settled before we go any further into the subject. There may be a tendency to portray Swamiji as simply the instrument through which Sri Ramakrishna worked out his divine plan. To do that is not only unfair, but also an error, I feel.

Leadership: Some Definitions

On the subject of leadership, never have so many laboured so long to say so little. What Braque once said about art is also true of leadership: 'The thing that matters in art is the part that cannot be explained.'¹ Like love, everyone knows leadership exists, but nobody could quite define it. The recently retired CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, however, succinctly defines a leader as

someone who can develop a vision of what he or she wants their business, their unit, their activity to do and be. Somebody who is able to articulate to the entire unit what the unit is and gain through a sharing of the discussion—listening and talking—an acceptance of that vision. And then relentlessly drive implementation of that vision to a successful conclusion.²

Jack Welch does not like the term manager because it has come to mean someone who 'controls rather than facilitates, complicates rather than simplifies, acts more like a governor than an accelerator.' The traditional definition of manager as someone who is responsible for the work of other people has be-

come hopelessly inappropriate according to him. He wants his key people to stop managing and start leading. Hence the term 'leader-manager', meaning a manager who leads. 'Manage by creating a vision—and then make sure that your employees run with that vision,' he says. The difference between a leader, a leader-manager, and a 'good' manager may be just a matter of semantics, and the terms will be used here interchangeably.

Of course Welch was talking about business leaders, whose main job is to ensure sustenance and improvement of the bottom line. But the principle applies to leaders in any institution, whether profit or non-profit. By initiating the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, whose branches in the West are called Vedanta Societies, Swamiji personified, word for word, the above definition of a leader laid down by Welch. Leadership is the capacity to translate vision or intention into reality and sustain it. Swamiji had excess capacity in this arena.

The leader, or leader-manager, creates the *vision* (a highly desirable future state—what we will be), describes the *mission* (what we will do), and then identifies the *critical success factors* (what must go right), *values* (fundamental beliefs), *goals*, *objectives*, and finally the *action plan*. Quigley, in his book *Vision*, claims that 'a leader's power is the capacity to translate a vision and supporting values into reality and sustain them.'³

Swamiji, a visionary par excellence, actually had two separate visions: global and national. He expressed his global vision during the World's Parliament of Religions, towards the end of his speech on Hinduism, when he spoke on the concept of a universal religion. At the national level, his vision was the uplift of the Indian masses through the spread of ed-

ucation, science and technology, tempered with India's sublime spiritual heritage. His primary mission, in both cases, was to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message of universal harmony.

The Three Fundamental Skills

Strategic thinking, innovation, and decision-making are the three fundamental skills leaders must master. Swami Vivekananda was a leader in the true sense, because he had mastered all the three. The leader uses the first skill to formulate, articulate, communicate, and implement a clear, concise, explicit strategy and vision for the organization. The second skill involves promoting this kind of thinking in others and generating concepts to expand the organization to serve various niches. The third skill is the ability to deal with the day-to-day operational problems and decisions successfully. Swamiji demonstrated his dexterity in all the three skills.

Are Leaders Born or Made?

There are two theories behind the emergence of leaders. One is that leaders are born, and the other is that great events propel people into leadership roles. The latter viewpoint, however, has replaced the former to a large extent. If we believe Hindu philosophy about predilection and destiny, then we can say that leaders are born. They may not show their abilities early because the time isn't ripe. The summons to their calling will eventually make them emerge as leaders. Sri Ramakrishna visualized Swamiji as the sage who would come to earth for a specific purpose. He was summoned to his calling later through Sri Ramakrishna's comment: 'Naren will teach others.' Nevertheless, we cannot totally discard the other theory. The 'great event' in Swamiji's case would be his phenomenal success at the World's Parliament of Religions. Indians were then in the slough of despair and despondency. Swamiji's success in the West awakened them to a sense of the greatness and glory of their ancestral faith, and he was un-

equivocally accepted as a leader upon his return to India. The tributes he received from Colombo to Almora bear witness to that.

As far as Swamiji was concerned, leaders are born. In a letter written in 1894 to his brother disciple, Swami Ramakrishnananda, he said: 'Can a leader be made my brother? A leader is born. Do you understand? And it is a very difficult task to take on the role of a leader.'⁴ Then, in his heart of hearts, he probably knew why he was born, and his statement was a reflection of that. If he didn't know initially, Sri Ramakrishna knew and convinced him of that.

In his book *Management and Machiavelli*, Anthony Jay says: 'The yogi is the contemplative man, the thinker ... the commissar, on the other hand, is the man of action.'⁵ Swamiji was a yogi, both figuratively and in reality. He was that rare individual who was a commissar as well, making him high on both vision and implementation. The dreamer, the yogi, has vision but no implementation skill. The doer, the commissar, is high on implementation, but not great as a visionary. Swamiji was a 'leader-manager', having an abundance of both skills.

Leadership Traits in Swamiji

Empathy: A highly desirable quality in any manager is empathy. The dictionary defines it as 'the imaginative projection of one's own consciousness into that of another person.' Simply put, it is the knack of putting yourself in the other fellow's shoes. When Swamiji had failed to persuade another brother disciple, Swami Saradananda, to come to England to carry forward his work in his absence, he changed his strategy. He perceived the apprehension in Saradananda's mind against taking the giant leap to face the gigantic scholars of the West. He wrote to him: 'I know all of you, your powers and your limitations. I would not have called you to any task which you are incompetent to do. ... I would have moulded you to it.' Then he ended with:

I would not bother you any more. ... I am very

glad I have been of some service to you sometimes if you think so. ... You need not disturb yourself at all about me. I want no help from any human being in any country. So good-bye! May the Lord bless you for ever and ever!⁶

Swami Saradananda, needless to say, left for England shortly thereafter. Swamiji knew that Saradananda could not ignore such an appeal. In this case, Swamiji could also be using the management principle: 'Different strokes for different folks.' You have to have a capacity for empathy to do that.

Capacity for empowerment: In addition to empathy, the above example points to another important managerial attribute in Swamiji's repertoire: a capacity for empowerment. A leader can empower people by expecting more of them than they think they can possibly achieve. People can do incredible things if their leader expects them to. According to Ken Blanchard,

The real essence of empowerment comes from releasing the knowledge, experience, and motivational power that is already in people but is being severely underutilised.

The working lives of Swamis Ramakrishnananda, Saradananda, Turiyananda, Trigunatitananda and others are prime examples of that.

While in London in 1895, Swamiji was scheduled to give a lecture. When the time came to stand up and speak, Swamiji suddenly announced that Swami Saradananda would deliver the speech instead of him. Though taken by surprise Saradananda did an excellent job that day, and thereafter. Swamiji had realized that all Saradananda needed was a little push to bolster his self-confidence. Now that's empowerment!

As a brother disciple, mentor, coach, and teacher he led people to live and work on the basis of a sound system of personal value, never sacrificing integrity for expediency, accepting the obligation to help others help themselves achieve the potential of latent talents. In his book *The Human Side of Enterprise* Douglas McGregor says 'effective managers

know how to tap the unrealized potential present in people.'⁸ Swamiji knew that very well, and made seemingly ordinary people extraordinary.

Having a viable action plan: One of the very important traits of a manager is his bias for action. Visualizing and then formulating a plan is fine, but that needs to be followed by a decision and a plan of action. That is where the rubber meets the road. Swamiji was very much cognizant of that. One example, among many others, comes to my mind. Swamiji wrote to Ole Bull, from England, about publishing *Raja Yoga*: 'Your letters are full of explanations [and] directions, but not one word about what is to be done!!!'⁹ The letter indicates his healthy impatience with Mrs Ole Bull's inaction. 'Remember the *only sign of life* is motion and growth,' Swamiji says in another letter. Swamiji loathed inaction, and subscribed to the sentiment that it is better to work in sin than do nothing at all.

The *Bhagavadgita* says: 'You have a right to action, but never to its fruits; let not the fruits of your works be the motive, neither let there be in you any attachment to inactivity' (2.47). How does it apply to 'management by results'? If 'action' is integral to management, so are the 'results'. The feedback loop, otherwise, is not complete. How can you act without any thought about the fruit of your action? Well, we can look at it this way. Utilitarianism points to the theory that the aim of any action is the greatest happiness for the largest number of people. So action does consider the usefulness of its consequences. If the consequence is 'common good' to the world—maybe in a relative sense, without a hint of selfishness on the part of one performing the action—utilitarianism fits in well with the tutelage of the *Gita*. The results of action, in essence, transcend any personal benefit.

While laying down the rules of management of the Ramakrishna Order, Swamiji wrote to Ramakrishnananda from England:

It is not for gaining personal authority that I do this, but for your good and for fulfilling the pur-

pose for which the Lord [referring to Sri Ramakrishna] came. He gave me the charge of you all, and you shall contribute to the great well-being of the world (7.491).

With that thought in mind, the management of the organization, the actions and the fruits thereof, becomes consistent with the *Gita* tenet. Long before that, in a letter to Alasinga Perumal from Breezy Meadows, Swamiji wrote: 'We will do great things for the world, and that for the sake of doing good and not for name and fame' (5.29). Later, in 1894, he wrote again: 'Thou hast the right to work but not to the fruits thereof. Stand firm like a rock. Truth always triumphs' (5.57). There are examples like this throughout Swamiji's life, depicting him as a leader-manager seeking results, but yet a karma yogi.

Power of organization: During the Parliament of Religions in Chicago Swamiji was staying with the Lyon family. One day he said to Mrs Lyon that he had the greatest temptation of his life in America. When Mrs Lyon inquired about the identity of the woman she thought Swamiji was referring to, he laughed and said: 'Oh, it is not a lady, it is Organization!'¹⁰ The greatest organizational achievement of that time was, undoubtedly, the staging of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Swamiji saw with his own eyes how the greatest show of the century had been staged with admirable enterprise by an immaculate organization. It served over 27 million visitors over 179 days, and everybody got his or her money's worth. He wrote to Haridas Viharidas Desai in 1894: 'The secret of success of the Westerners is the power of organization and combination [conjoined action]. That is only possible with mutual trust and cooperation and help.'¹¹ He was referring to what is now a popular cliché: 'Trust and teamwork, or T and T.'

Swamiji had perceived the power of organization long before Andrew Carnegie, who said: 'Take away our factories, take away our trade, our avenues of transportation, our money. Leave us nothing but our organiza-

tion, and in four years we shall have re-established ourselves.' Swamiji's letter to Alasinga Perumal from New York clearly illustrates his awareness of the power of organization and cooperation. He says: 'The faculty of organisation is entirely absent in our nature, but this has to be infused. ... Be always ready to concede to the opinions of your brethren, and try always to conciliate. That is the whole secret' (5.37). Organization literally means people working together towards a common goal.

Again and again Swamiji's letters to his peers and followers stressed the importance of organization. In 1896 he wrote to Swami Trigunatitananda from New York:

You need a little business faculty. ... Now what you want is organisation—that requires strict obedience and division of labour. ... I am determined to make you decent workers, thoroughly organized (6.361).

He had made it very clear that Swami Brahmananda should be looking after money matters, Swami Niranjanananda should be in charge of the maintenance of buildings, furniture, water supply, etc, and Swami Saradananda, the secretary, in charge of all paperwork. He made changes to this staffing from time to time, but Swami Brahmananda stayed as an anchor at the helm of the accounts department. Swami Brahmananda eventually succeeded Swamiji as the President of Ramakrishna Mission organization. A scenario where the financial controller becomes the chief executive is rather typical in corporations, although Swamiji could have had other reasons for choosing Swami Brahmananda as his successor.

In 1896, a few months before returning to India, Swamiji, in a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda, laid down the ground rules of running the Math. This letter about the management of the Math is a classic example of a systematic and comprehensive documentation of operating principles and procedures that could be the envy of any ISO 9000 company. After founding the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897, Swamiji laid down its aims and

objectives. Sanyal points out in *A Commemorative Volume* the striking similarity between the constitutions of the Ramakrishna Mission and that of another truly global organization: UNESCO. It is really amazing that five decades later a body of the world's foremost intellectuals could add very little to the ideas presented by Swamiji.

Human resources development: Another important responsibility of a manager is to develop people to better achieve the organization's objectives. He develops people to carry forth his ideas when he is there, but more importantly when he is not there. The organization should not suffer due to the manager's absence. Swamiji had a premonition that he would leave this world before he turned forty. He mentioned that on several occasions. For the last few years of his life he had constantly agonized over what would happen to the organization he founded so painstakingly to fulfil his master's wish. He wanted to make sure the various operations would run like clockwork, with adept people at its helm. He was, no doubt, fortunate to have a group of highly motivated people at his disposal that loved and adored him, making his job easy. But they needed first to be taught and coached, and then directed towards the common goal. From this point of view Swamiji was a master.

Evidences of Swamiji's complete mastery over the aspect of management development are scattered everywhere in his letters. Due to his prolonged absence from India, he hardly had the chance of coaching and teaching in person; but he did that through the numerous letters he wrote from the West, indicating how effective this medium could be, transmitting thoughts and ideas, when executed by a powerful but empathetic mind. A prime example is his long letter in 1895, one of his best considering the teaching aspect of its content, again to Swami Ramakrishnananda, where he says:

Now, let me give you some instructions. This letter is meant for you. Please go through these instructions once a day and act up to them. ...

The reason why I give you these few instructions is that there is an organizing power in you—the Lord has made this known to me—but it is not yet fully developed. Through His blessings it would soon be (6.326-7).

After preparing the groundwork and setting his brother disciple's mind at ease, Swamiji goes on and gives him a plethora of operating principles, advice, counsel, and suggestions. Development occurs only when a modification of behaviour takes place. The modification results in expanded capability and attitude to achieve results. Swamiji was successful in accomplishing that with Swami Ramakrishnananda, who went ahead and himself became a highly successful leader as the founder-head of Madras Math.

Integrity of character: But when all is said and done, developing people requires a basic quality in the effective manager. It requires integrity of character. When the reward is all internal, it is the pupil's respect for the teacher's character that facilitates the development. Some of the skills required for a manager can be learned, though perhaps not always taught. Swamiji probably developed his organizational perspective observing the American organizations perform. But one quality cannot be learned; it is character. The manager has to inherently possess this quality. Competence or brilliance does not matter if one is lacking in the qualities of character. An infinite abundance of this quality made Swamiji a highly successful manager, coach, and mentor. He was the ultimate developer of people.

Propensity for hard work: One of the basic requirements of a good manager, or a leader-manager, is a *propensity for hard work*—with emphasis on 'hard'. There is nothing easy about being a manager, and those who lack that propensity, or have it but would prefer to suppress it, should seek occupations where they will be able to evade any need to apply themselves diligently. These people should realize that industriousness has in it a sense of morality, idleness a betrayal of human capacity. Swamiji himself took this idea

to the extreme, even jeopardizing his own health in the process. He demanded exacting workmanship of himself as well as of his followers. His letters from the US constantly reminded his followers in India the desirability of a good work habit. 'Work, work, work' was his favourite battle cry; work without expecting the fruit thereof.

Ability to transform others: Continuous improvement was one of the major corporate initiatives in the 1990s, but Swamiji had used the concept in 1895 when he wrote to Perumal: 'Do not figure out big plans at first, but begin slowly, feel your ground, and proceed up and up. ... Let things slowly grow. Rome was not built in a day' (5.75).

James MacGregor Burns, in his book *Leadership*, talks about two types of leadership: transaction-prone and transforming. Transaction-prone leadership is based on the exchange of valued things between the leader and the follower. Political leaders usually fall in this category when they exchange some concessions for votes. Transforming leadership, a much more potent kind of leadership, occurs when the leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Burns uses Gandhi as an example 'who aroused and elevated the hopes and demands of millions of Indians and whose life and personality were enhanced in the process.' Another example could be Subhas Chandra Bose. Although his demand for blood in exchange for freedom ('*Tum hamko khoon do, ham tumko azadi denge*') looks like a transaction leadership approach, he was working at a much higher level of human need. That people can be lifted to their better selves is the secret of transforming leadership.

Swamiji took transforming leadership to the transcendental level. It is 'dynamic leadership in the sense that the leaders throw themselves into a relationship with followers who will feel "elevated" by it and often become more active themselves, thereby creating new cadres of leaders'. In the pantheon of great leaders in India in recent times, he was the

only one who was able to do that. Swamiji's relationship with his disciples, brother disciples, and followers is a prime example of that transcendental leadership.

Communication skills: Communication, oral or verbal, is something Swamiji was best at. His letters, speeches, parlour talks—all give testimony to his complete mastery over this art. When it came to oral presentation, he was second to none. Time and time again we find first-hand witnesses commenting on his power of communication, his innate ability to connect with the audience by purposefully exchanging meanings and sharing understanding. When looking at a list of important leadership or managerial traits, effective communication is always found at or near the top.

Most of his directives and recommendations came to his peers and followers in the form of letters, because he was a globetrotter in the true sense of the word. But these were clear and concise, and people had no difficulty following them. Communication is complete only when the recipient knows what you mean and reacts in the way you desire. Swamiji accomplished that almost always. To get an idea of his organizational communication skill, one has to read his numerous letters where he tells his brother monks in India what exactly to do, and tells that clearly from across the ocean.

Wisdom: Wisdom, an elusive quality, is essential for a top class manager. Planning, coordinating, staffing, executing, communicating may be sufficient for line and staff executives, but the top man, the CEO, needs more—he needs wisdom. What is wisdom? It is a difficult question to answer. Just like data is not useful until it is transformed into information, knowledge is not complete until it is developed into wisdom. It includes an understanding of certain basic facts that are true of all. Swamiji had that in plenty. When he was just thirty years in age, he was 4000 years old in wisdom! Proof of his serene wisdom is scattered everywhere—in his lectures, letters, and personal discussions. Moreover, he was never

satisfied with mere philosophical contemplation—he translated wisdom into action.

Ability to praise and criticize others: As a leader-manager Swamiji liberally used praise as a tool for motivation. He wrote to Alasinga Perumal in 1894: 'You all have done well, my brave unselfish children. I am so proud of you. ... Hope and do not despair. After such a start, if you despair you are a fool' (5.47). In another letter to his brother disciples in 1895 he praised them by saying:

Look for instance how Shashi will remain always constant to his spot; his steadfastness is a great foundation-rock. How successfully Kali and Jogen brought about the Town Hall meeting; it was indeed a momentous task! Niranjan has done much work in Ceylon and elsewhere. How extensively has Sarada travelled and sown seeds of gigantic future works! Whenever I think of the wonderful renunciation of Hari, about his steadiness of intellect and forbearance, I get a new access of strength! In Tulasi, Gupta, Baburam, Sharat, to mention a few, in every one of you there is a tremendous energy (6.323).

Now that was some adulation! Coming from their beloved leader, this must have energized the troops no end.

Swamiji had also disbursed reprimand or criticism occasionally with equal dexterity, tempering them, however, with love and affection. This was his way to awaken his followers into action, and they accepted those in a positive way. Referring to his followers' reaction to missionary propaganda, he wrote to Alasinga Perumal in 1895:

So long as you shriek at the missionary attempts and jump without being able to do anything, I laugh at you; you are lithe dollies, that is what you are. ... What can Swami do for old babies! I know, my son, I shall have to come and manufacture men out of you. I know that India is only inhabited by women and eunuchs (5.86).

Swamiji as a Leader-Steward

We have seen Swamiji as a leader-manager. But he also played the subtle role of leadership as a 'leader-steward'. In his seminal

book *Servant Leadership*, Robert Greenleaf touched on a similar form of leadership by saying: 'The servant leader is servant first. ... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. This conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.'²² Leader-stewardship was probably a more appropriate role Swamiji played. He was drawn to leadership because he felt compelled to serve a purpose larger than himself, his master's wish. His sense of stewardship operated on two levels: stewardship for the people he led, his brother disciples and followers, and stewardship for the large purpose or mission that was fundamental to the Ramakrishna Movement. Swamiji found satisfaction in giving than in receiving, in contributing than in taking, being motivated not by extractive acquisition but by dedicated, creative service to the organization he was trying to found and perpetuate.

Herb Kelleher, the CEO of Southwest Airlines, a highly successful US corporation that has captivated the interest of *Forbes*, *Business Week*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, believes that servanthood is a form of leadership particularly well suited to today's business world. Well, Swamiji had realized it more than a hundred years ago when he wrote to his disciple Alasinga Perumal from New England: 'Now organize a little society. You will have to take charge of the whole movement, not as a *leader*, but as a *servant*.'¹³ In another instance he wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda that 'to take on the role of a leader one must be a servant of servants.'¹⁴ This concept of 'servant leadership' was deeply embedded in Swamiji's mind and he repeatedly mentioned it in his letters.

Kelleher based his management approach on love, care, and respect, and made Southwest Airlines 'air travel's greatest show on earth,' according to management guru Tom Peters. The people at Southwest focus on 'serving the legitimate want and need of the people they care about, even if this involves some pain and self-sacrifice,' say Freiberg and Freiberg in their book *Nuts!*, an inspiring book

about Southwest Airlines.¹⁵ Kelleher's thought process as a leader is very similar to that of Swamiji's, in spite of the fact that the former runs a business for profit. Most Southwest employees think that the company exists to serve a purpose, not just to make profit. It takes an unusual leader to inculcate that type of belief in people. Enough about Kelleher.

Globalization First

Globalization is a relatively recent phenomenon in the business world. It started on a somewhat serious note around mid twentieth century, and picked up a feverish pace towards the end of the millennium. But most companies were first local, and then they went global. Swamiji, an astute visionary manager, had approached the issue from the other direction. He globalized his service organization first, long before the term was in vogue. The Vedanta Society was first organized in New York in 1894, but the Ramakrishna Mission was not organized in Calcutta until 1897. Vedanta Societies in Los Angeles and San Francisco had sprouted long before Ramakrishna Mission centres were organized in Bombay or Delhi. He had recognized the needs of different markets, if you will, and structured his organization to respond to the varying needs of the marketplace. The organizations in the West served mainly the spiritual needs, whereas those in India were organized to serve spiritual, as well as social, educational, and humanitarian needs. From his observation he had realized that the Western society did a satisfactory job of meeting the latter needs.

* * *

While translating his vision into reality, Swamiji created the vision, developed the team, clarified the values, communicated the goals, coached the people, empowered them, and measured the progress. Aren't these right out of the present-day textbooks on management? Capitalizing on his leadership and managerial abilities Swamiji had essentially

created a global service organization that has run so successfully for over a hundred years, and will continue to run. The organization's operating principles today remain as they were when he framed them. Both as leader and manager Swamiji excelled in the basic functions of management: establishing a philosophy, planning, organizing, integrating and measuring. It is then little wonder his portrait hangs on the wall of the CEO of one of the world's leading management consultant firms, another service organization. *

References

1. Quoted in Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 5.
2. See *Business Weekly*, 14 December 1987.
3. Joseph V Quigley, *Vision* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), p. 10.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), vol. 6, p. 284. [Hereafter CW, followed by volume and page numbers.]
5. Anthony Jay, *Management and Machiavelli* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), p. 113.
6. CW, 8.365-6.
7. Ken Blanchard, John B Carlos and Alan Randolph, *The Three Keys to Empowerment* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), p. 6.
8. Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), p. 4.
9. CW, 9.85.
10. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), vol. 1, p. 444.
11. CW, 8.328.
12. Robert K Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 134.
13. CW, 5.41.
14. *ibid.*, 6.284.
15. Kevin Freiberg and Jackie Freiberg, *Nuts!* (Texas: Bard Press, 1996), p. 311.

Sri Ramakrishna's Attitude towards Women

KRISHNA VERMA

A young man once asked his old aunt if she had read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The aunt retorted: 'Oh, that book! It only speaks of *kamini-kanchana* ('woman and gold'). I wouldn't read a book which expresses only hatred for women.' Even today, many people who are not much acquainted with Sri Ramakrishna's ideas and attitude towards women, conclude that Sri Ramakrishna hated women, after giving the *Gospel* a casual reading. Swami Vivekananda realized that if a literal translation of the term (*kamini-kanchana*) is made in English the Western world would form an adverse opinion of his great Master. They would find it difficult to understand the significance of his teaching. Hence he instructed Swami Ramakrishnananda to use the term 'lust and gold' instead of 'woman and gold'.¹

In this essay, an attempt has been made to examine Sri Ramakrishna's attitude towards women, how he looked upon them. The subject will be divided into four parts dealing with his attitude towards his mother and other elderly ladies; his women disciples and his disciples' wives; and other women, many of whom were not quite respectable. His attitude towards his own wife was unparalleled and absolutely unique. That we will take up for the last.

His Mother and Other Elderly Women

First, let us start with his mother. All avatars, all great men of the world, have shown great respect for their mothers. It was not dif-

ferent with Sri Ramakrishna. But what surprises us is his complete obedience to the words and wishes of his mother. When Sri Ramakrishna was a small boy, his mother once told him that all women were like her, so he should not do anything which might hurt their sense of honour, he should not go to the ghat when ladies were bathing or changing clothes. What scoldings and rebukes failed to do, a word from his mother did. He obeyed his mother.²

During his sadhana, when Sri Ramakrishna was in a God-intoxicated state and

It is true that in almost every page of the *Gospel* we find Sri Ramakrishna warning his male disciples against 'woman and gold'. But what he actually meant was that men should beware of lust and greed...

thought insane by people, his mother was concerned. With a view to bringing him back to normalcy, she arranged for his marriage. He immediately agreed, and not only that. He also told his people where to find his bride (pp. 176-7).

When his mother grew old, Sri Ramakrishna brought her to the Dakshineswar temple like a truly devoted son, kept her near him, looked after her comforts and rendered personal service to her. This at a time when love of God had made him absolutely oblivious of his own body!

At the time of Sri Ramakrishna's Vedanta sadhana, when he was asked by his guru Totapuri to be initiated into sannyasa, his only request was that the initiation be held secretly to avoid inflicting pain on his old grief-stricken mother (p. 248).

In Vrindaban he met a great devotee by name Ganga Mai, who insisted on his staying there permanently. He was also quite inclined, but when he remembered his mother, who

'Everyone now says, he did not allow women to touch him or even to approach him. We laugh to hear it and think, "We are not dead yet." Who will know how kind he was ? He had the same attitude towards men and women.'

was staying at Dakshineswar, and thought how sad she would be, he immediately gave up the idea (pp. 566-7).

After his mother's death, when he found that as a sannyasin he could not perform the last rites, he got these done by his nephew. But sitting in a secluded place, he paid off, as far as possible, his debt to his mother by weeping for her (p. 568). Such was his reverence for his mother!

Dhani Kamarni, a blacksmith by caste, was the midwife when Sri Ramakrishna was born. She was very fond of him, and it was her heart's desire to be his *bhiksha mata* at the time of his sacred thread ceremony (*upanayana*). *Bhiksha mata* is the woman who gives the first alms to the new brahmin. Ramakrishna came to know of this desire of Dhani, and promised to fulfil it. When the time came he insisted on having his first *bhiksha* from her. But such a thing was unthinkable! Sri Ramakrishna was born in a family so orthodox that gifts would not be accepted even from those brahmins who accepted gifts from non-brahmins. The question of accepting anything directly from a non-brahmin was taboo. But the boy was determined. No family tradition, no caste consideration could deviate him from his decision (pp. 54-5). His argument was that truthfulness is essential for a brahmin. *Upanayana* would be meaningless for him if he could not keep his promise. He never attached any importance to caste distinctions so prevalent at that time. Even in his later age he would often say that devotees do not belong to any caste, they are a class by themselves.

Apart from Dhani, there were many other ladies to whom Sri Ramakrishna endeared himself. Some of them were older than him, while some were his age. He would tell them mythological stories, sing devotional songs, reproduce theatre dialogues, or imitate some funny characters of the village and make them laugh till tears rolled down from their eyes. His behaviour was so free that the ladies would forget that he was after all a young man (p. 66).

When Sri Ramakrishna wanted to practise Tantra sadhana, Bhairavi Brahmani arrived at Dakshineswar. She saw in Sri Ramakrishna a divinely gifted aspirant, most suited for this particular mode of worshipping the Divine Mother. Bhairavi Brahmani was a great scholar and spiritual aspirant, well versed in Tantric literature and adept in the ways of Tantric worship. Sri Ramakrishna readily agreed to become her disciple and showed her all the veneration due to a spiritual preceptor. He did not hesitate to accept a female guru.

Rani Rasmani, the devoted lady who built the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, came in close contact with Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna was employed as a priest in the temple. The devout Rani used to come to the temple to worship and would often request the young priest to sing devotional songs for her. One day when she was listening to the songs, her mind drifted away towards some worldly problems. Sensing this, Sri Ramakrishna slapped her for her unmindfulness. This incident reveals what a great teacher Sri Ramakrishna was: he would not tolerate devotees or any of his disciples deviating from the path to God even slightly, and would not spare anybody, even if it were his own employer. As a true well-wisher of the Rani, he taught her how to concentrate her mind on God. The Rani too took the punishment in the right spirit. She realized her own mistake, and was against any action on the young priest (pp. 419-20).

Jagadamba Dasi, the daughter of Rani

Rasmani and wife of Mathuranath Biswas was also devoted to Sri Ramakrishna. She used to look after him as a mother does her child. Both she and her husband would take care of Sri Ramakrishna; they would make him stay in their house, arranging for him to sleep in their own bedroom! Deeply immersed in sadhana Sri Ramakrishna had become so childlike that it was impossible for him to take care of himself. He would live in the ladies' quarters, and they would sometimes dress him up as a woman and take him to the Durga puja pandal with them (pp. 438-9). Dressed as a woman, Sri Ramakrishna would simply become one of them. Even Mathur Babu, who was seeing him constantly, was unable to recognize him.

The case of Gopaler Ma is unique. She was a devotee of Child Krishna and when she met Sri Ramakrishna, she saw in him Sri Krishna, her Chosen Ideal. Thus she had a motherly feeling as well as a devotee's attitude towards him. Sri Ramakrishna also would suitably respond to her feelings. Sometimes like a small child, he would ask her to cook some favourite dish for him. There were also times when as a true guru he would correct her mistakes. Both reverence and affection were reflected in his dealings with her.

His Women Devotees

Sri Ramakrishna had many women devotees of different age groups. Golap Ma, Yogan Ma, Gauri Ma and many others came to him for religious instruction. Because of the purdah system prevalent at the time, many others may not be known to us. Apart from these, there were his disciples' wives or other women relatives who accompanied them on their visits. Sri Ramakrishna's attitude towards them was one of affection and concern. To him, women of any age, class or caste were only so many different forms of the Universal Mother. Certain incidents in the *Great Master* testify to this. On seeing a woman he would simply fold his hands and address her as Ma Anandamayee ('Blissful Mother')!

'Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother. I cannot bear to see them suffer. You are all images of the Mother of the Universe.'

—Sri Ramakrishna

A woman devotee, after narrating her visits to Sri Ramakrishna, describes how he welcomed and entertained her and her friends:

The Master did not usually seem to us to be a man at all. It seemed to us that he was one of us. That is why we did not feel the slightest shyness or hesitation in his presence, as we do in the presence of men. If, however, it came on rare occasions we forgot it immediately and would express to him our mental feelings without any hesitation whatever (pp. 343-4).

She continues:

Everyone now says, he did not allow women to touch him or even to approach him. We laugh to hear it and think, 'We are not dead yet.' Who will know how kind he was? He had the same attitude towards men and women (p. 346).

Those days it was not easy for a woman to go out all by herself. Ladies of respectable families could not even set foot on the streets. Moreover, some of them were poor and unable to hire a carriage. Hence Sri Ramakrishna, while asking them to visit him more frequently, also gave the solution:

Three or four of you should join and take a boat while you come; and walk to Baranagar and share a carriage there while you return home (p. 345).

When Mahendranath Gupta's ('M.' of *Gospel* fame) seven-year-old son died, his wife became mentally unbalanced. Sri Ramakrishna was much concerned about her. He asked M. not to let her work in the kitchen lest the heat aggravate her illness, and to always have somebody near her to look after her. When she wanted to stay at Dakshineswar with Holy Mother, because she used to get

mental peace when she was in the company of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna told her with great compassion, 'That will be all right. But you talk of dying. That frightens me. And the Ganges is so near!'³ Another day, M. came to Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied with his wife and a son. It was at the Cossipore garden house, where Sri Ramakrishna was staying for his treatment. In M.'s words:

It was at the Master's request that he brought his wife, who was almost mad with grief owing to the death of one of her sons.

That day the Master several times allowed M.'s wife the privilege of waiting on him. Her welfare seemed to occupy his attention a great deal. ... The Master tenderly asked her many questions about her household. He requested her to come again to the garden house and spend a few days with the Holy Mother, not forgetting to ask her to bring her baby daughter.

His kindness touched M.'s heart (pp. 973-4).

Elsewhere M. narrates the visit of two young ladies, wives of two brothers, who came to Sri Ramakrishna for some spiritual advice. They had been fasting in preparation for this visit. Sri Ramakrishna asked them to perform Siva puja, and told them how to keep the mind always attached to God even while going about their household chores. Then he said:

'Why have you fasted? You should take your meal before you come here. Women are but so many forms of my Divine Mother. I cannot bear to see them suffer. You are all images of the Mother of the Universe. Come here after you have eaten, and you will feel happy.'

Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna asked Ramlal [his nephew], to give the ladies some food. They were given fruits, sweets, drinks, and other offerings from the temple.

The Master said: 'You have eaten something. Now my mind is at peace. I cannot bear to see women fast' (pp. 431-2).

Such was his attitude, his concern for women.

Gauri Ma came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna through Balaram Bose, a great disciple of his. She was not an ordinary devo-

tee. Sri Ramakrishna wanted to make her an instrument for the uplift of the women of Calcutta. His heart used to weep at the miserable condition of women, and he would urge Gauri Ma to do something for them. Once he told her: 'Gauri, let me pour water and you knead the mud.' When Gauri Ma did not understand the intended meaning, he made it clear:

The condition of women in this country is very poor and painful. You will have to work for them. ... You will have to work in the city. You have practised enough spiritual disciplines. Now you should serve the women with your spiritual energy.⁴

This incident reveals two things: Sri Ramakrishna's feeling for the suffering women, and his confidence in Gauri Ma's capability. He also knew that it was only through a woman that women could be served effectively.

Women also knew how much feeling, how much affection and respect Sri Ramakrishna had for them. That is why when Golap Ma lost her only daughter, she came to him to get mental peace. When he visited her house, she said in a half-choked voice:

This joy is too much for me. Perhaps I shall die of it. Tell me friends, how shall I be able to live? I did not feel such a thrill even when Chandi, my daughter, used to visit the house accompanied by liveried footmen, with armed guards lining both sides of the street. Oh! Now I have no trace of my grief at her death.⁵

When Navagopal Ghosh's wife Nistarini had a son, she snugly bundled the newborn child in a sheet, and went to Dakshineswar with her husband to offer it to the Master. When Sri Ramakrishna realized that it was the baby that she was offering him, he affectionately told her to keep it in her custody until the time came when he would claim it back. When her son became a monk of the Ramakrishna Order after some twenty years, Nistarini was very happy to be relieved of her great responsibility, to be able to return her son to the real owner!

Such was the wonderful relationship that Sri Ramakrishna had with his women devo-

tees. We could cite only a few examples. Women of that time were mostly confined to their homes and were less communicative. How many others there were, exactly how many received his grace, it is difficult to say.

Socially outcast women

When Sri Ramakrishna was absorbed in his sadhana and had totally forgotten the outside world, Rani Rasmani and Mathur Babu, her son-in-law, thought it to be the derangement of his brain, produced by unbroken continence. Thinking that he might regain his health if his continence were broken, they tried to tempt him through some women of ill fame. Sri Ramakrishna, who only saw the Divine Mother in those women, addressed them as 'Mother' went into samadhi. Seeing that, there arose a feeling of maternal affection in the hearts of those women. They begged his pardon again and again, and left with tears in their eyes.⁶ Time and again we hear Sri Ramakrishna say: 'Women are, all of them, the veritable images of Sakti.'⁷ 'All women are the embodiments of Sakti. It is the Primal Power that has become woman and appears to us in the form of women' (p. 336).

On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna said:

One day I saw a woman in blue, standing near the bakul tree. She was a prostitute. But she instantly kindled in me the vision of Sita. I forgot the woman. I saw it was Sita herself on her way to meet Rama after her rescue from Ravana in Ceylon. For a long time I remained in samadhi, unconscious of the outer world (p. 231).

We must remember that Sita was the embodiment of absolute chastity! Never did Sri Ramakrishna show any contempt even for socially outcast women.

Actresses in those days were generally looked down upon by society. The prevalent impression was that they were women of questionable character. No respectable lady would mix with them, and most men preferred to keep away from them. It was Sri Ramakrishna who gave them social status. He

would go to theatres which staged dramas on religious themes. Whenever he went to see any play, the actors and actresses would come to him to pay their respects. We get a beautiful description in the *Gospel* of his visit to the Star Theatre:

After the theatre, the actresses, following Girish's instructions, came to the room to salute Sri Ramakrishna. They bowed before him, touching the ground with their foreheads. The devotees noticed that some of the actresses, in saluting the Master, touched his feet. He said to them very tenderly, 'Please don't do that, mother!'

After the actresses had left the room, Sri Ramakrishna said to the devotees, 'It is all He, only in different forms' (p. 683).

Bengal theatre and cinema did not forget Sri Ramakrishna's contribution in raising their social status. Even today many of these organizations begin their day's event only after paying homage to Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna's body was so pure that he could not bear the touch of any immoral person; that would cause severe pain and burning sensation in his body. Many a time we see him washing his feet with Ganges water repeatedly if some impure, worldly person touched them. But never would he be rude to them. There is the incident of Bhagavati Dasi, an old maidservant of the temple proprietor, whose past life was not very clean. Sri Ramakrishna had known her for many years, and his compassion was great. One day, when she saluted him from a distance, Sri Ramakrishna began conversing with her, kindly enquiring whether she was spending her time and money fruitfully. Encouraged by his sympathetic attitude Bhagavati approached and saluted him, touching his feet.

Like a man stung by a scorpion, Sri Ramakrishna stood up and cried out, 'Govinda! Govinda!' A big jar of Ganges water stood in a corner of the room. He hurried there, panting, and washed with the holy water the spot the maidservant had touched. The devotees in the room were amazed to see this incident. Bhagavati sat as if struck dead.

Sri Ramakrishna consoled her and said in a very kindly tone, 'You should salute me from a distance.' In order to relieve her mind of all embarrassment, the Master said tenderly, 'Listen to a few songs.'

The Master then sang about the Divine Mother (pp. 234-5).

We ordinary mortals cannot imagine how much pain an absolutely pure person has to bear when touched by an immoral person. Still, Sri Ramakrishna's compassion for the woman overrode his own suffering and he even sang for her to soothe her feelings!

Pagli, a crazy woman, belonged to a sect which advocated worship of God through the lover-beloved relationship (*madhura bhava*). She entertained romantic feelings towards Sri Ramakrishna. But Sri Ramakrishna, as we have seen, always looked upon every woman as the Divine Mother. He had told her of this, but she would not listen. She often came to the Cossipore garden house where Sri Ramakrishna lay ill and troubled everybody in order to see him, and would even burst into his room whenever she felt like. But Sri Ramakrishna was so compassionate that he was never harsh even to her. When the devotees were contemplating stricter measures to prevent her from disturbing him, Sri Ramakrishna told them with all tenderness, 'No, no! Let her come and go away.' He allowed her to salute him (p. 952-3).

Another incident which reveals Sri Ramakrishna's broad-mindedness, liberal outlook and love of fun is also worth mentioning. Binodini, the famous actress and a recipient of his grace, wanted to visit him once during his last illness. Sri Ramakrishna's young disciples who were nursing him were very cautious about allowing strangers to approach him, lest their touch aggravate his illness. However, one evening Binodini, with secret help from Kalipada Ghosh, dressed herself up as a European gentleman—hat, coat,

trouser and all—and, giving the attendants the slip, entered Sri Ramakrishna's room along with Kalipada. When Sri Ramakrishna recognized her, he was thoroughly amused. He praised her courage. Binodini touched his feet adoringly with her head. Pleased with her faith and devotion, Sri Ramakrishna blessed Binodini and gave her some spiritual advice. Later, after she left, Sri Ramakrishna laughed and joked, expressing joy at the trick played on the attending disciples.⁸

Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi

Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with his wife Sri Sarada Devi is the most difficult for us ordinary people to understand. It is not for us to fathom the depth of the love that existed between them, their attitude towards each other. Sri Ramakrishna is sometimes criticized by

Who else [other than Sri Ramakrishna] has ever shown so much respect, so much goodwill and concern for women!

people who think that he neglected his wife and failed in his duty as a husband. God knows what these people mean by 'negligence' or 'duty'! Sri Sarada Devi once reminisced about her days at Dakshineswar to one of her women disciples: about her living in a very small room with all the

necessary household things huddled together, devoting all her time to the service of her husband—cooking food for him and his devotees who might drop in any time of the day—and yet not getting a chance in months to see him even from a distance. But she said she was all bliss during those days! The very presence of her divine husband filled her with joy. In her own language, she used to feel as if a pitcher full of bliss was placed in her heart. This was Sri Sarada Devi's experience. And we shed tears of sympathy for the neglected wife!

So far as the question of duty towards the wife is concerned, Sri Ramakrishna took care to teach Sarada Devi everything, down to the minutest detail: how to run the household efficiently, how to interact socially with different

types of people, how to attain spiritual perfection, and also how to look after the spiritual welfare of others when the responsibility would fall on her shoulders. Not only that, he kept a close watch on her health and comfort. He advised her to walk to a nearby village now and then and visit her neighbours after lunch. He feared that living all alone in that congested room would be injurious to her health. He would himself make sure that the path was clear and nobody was around.

When Sarada Devi came to Dakshineswar for the first time she was having fever. She wanted to stay in the *nahabat* with her mother-in-law. But Sri Ramakrishna insisted that she stay in his room, saying that it would be convenient for the doctor to examine her there. It was only when she fully recovered from her illness that Sri Ramakrishna permitted her to go to the *nahabat*. Once Sarada Devi had a severe headache, and it greatly worried Sri Ramakrishna, who asked his nephew again and again, 'O Ramlal! Why this headache?'

Sri Ramakrishna cared for Sarada Devi in many other ways. He got some ornaments made for her saying, 'Women love ornaments!' Later, he jokingly commented to his devotees, 'This is my relationship with her.' During his last illness, he deposited some money in her name with Balaram Bose, so that after his passing away she did not have to face financial difficulties.

We must remember that all these considerations were shown by a man who, being all the time God-intoxicated, could not take care of himself. The love that existed between this divine couple is indeed something beyond our comprehension!

* * *

It is true that in almost every page of the

Gospel we find Sri Ramakrishna warning his male disciples against 'woman and gold'. But what he actually meant was that men should beware of lust and greed—the two doorways to spiritual downfall. This becomes very obvious when we read what we said when a certain devotee pointedly asked him whether a spiritual aspirant was supposed to abhor women. His reply was:

He who has realized God does not look upon a woman with the eye of lust; so he is not afraid of her. He perceives clearly that women are but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. He worships them all as the Mother Herself.⁹

This was Sri Ramakrishna's attitude towards women. Who else has ever shown so much respect, so much goodwill and concern for them! *

Notes and References

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Patravali* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1977), p. 464.
2. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), pp. 45-6. [Hereafter *Great Master*.]
3. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), pp. 721, 723. [Hereafter *Gospel*.] 'Mohini' was one of M.'s pseudonyms.
4. Swami Chetanananda, *The Lived with God* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), p. 163.
5. *Gospel*, p. 823.
6. *Great Master*, p.175.
7. *Gospel*, p.116.
8. *Great Master*, p. 867.
9. *Gospel*, p. 168.

One day Sarada Devi, as she was massaging the Master's feet, asked him, 'What do you think of me?' Quick came the answer, 'The Mother who is worshipped in the temple is the mother who has given birth to this body and is now living in the concert-room, and she again is massaging my feet at this moment. Verily I always look upon you as the visible representation of the Blissful mother.'



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

Vaiṣṇavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gauḍiya Tradition. Ed. Steven J Rosen. Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110007. 1994. ix + 354 pp. Rs 295.

This book is a series of lively conversations. Great scholars discuss with the editor, Steven J Rosen, various aspects of Vaiṣṇavism.

The attribute 'Gauḍiya' comes from Caitanya's being born in the Gauḍa region, situated in present-day West Bengal. A Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava is a person who loves Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa ardently, even as he loves Caitanya. He believes in the Acintya-bhedā-bheda philosophy, according to which Brahman is the 'aura' of Kṛṣṇa, who is the supreme Lord and the supreme Ideal beyond the dualities of dualism and non-dualism. The goal of a Vaiṣṇava is to attain supreme devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The devotee leads a pious life, practising *japa* of the Lord's name, and does not like either *mukti* or worldly pleasures. All he wants is devotion. Vaiṣṇavism acquired international repute when some *mahants* of the Gauḍiya Math began spreading the message of Caitanya far and wide, establishing Vaiṣṇava institutions everywhere.

The book contains three parts: Scripture, Person, and Philosophy. After an excellent discussion on the fundamentals of Vaiṣṇavism, the book discusses the Veda, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhagāvata*—in that order. Then there is a discussion on Caitanya. After a wonderful discussion on Caitanya's impact on different fields of thought, the editor takes us to south India. Not only was the south benefited by Caitanya, but Caitanya himself made disciples there, who proved to be of immense value. After this, there are discussions on 'Sonic Theology', 'Mysticism, Madness and Ecstasy', 'Personalism v Impersonalism' and 'Kṛṣṇa-Līlā'. There is also a beautiful chapter on 'Sādhana Bhakti'. The whole book is very absorbing.

Vaiṣṇavism is a miniature library on the Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇava faith. It is a grand attempt at bringing together in a single volume the opinions of different scholars on this faith and, as a by-product, introducing the Vaiṣṇava philosophy to the world. Steven J Rosen has made an excellent presentation

of the whole gamut of Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism. Though the attempt appears to be a bird's-eye view of the faith, the editor has succeeded in bringing out the best elements of the Caitanya bhakti movement in a remarkable manner.

A Monk

The Indus Script and the Ṛg Veda. Egbert Richter-Ushanas. Motilal Banarsidass. 1998. 223 pp. Rs 395.

In spite of the fact that a number of scholars have so far attempted to decipher the Indus seals, they are still enigmatic and pose a challenge to scholars who are drawn to further research. A *Concordance* to the texts in the Indus script by Koskeniemi and Parpola, (Helsinki: 1973), had gone a long way in eliciting the interest of scholars in this area. Furthermore, publication of the corpus of *Indus Seals and Inscriptions* (vols. 1 and 2) by Parpola, Joshi and Shah (Helsinki: 1987 and 1991), also proved useful in further decipherment.

The present book, however, strikes a new path in interpreting these obscure pictographic seals and inscriptions. It struck the author that the Indus script would, perhaps, open up in the hymnal context of the Vedas; and he found surprising results.

All these results are depicted here in ten chapters, running over 200 pages. Although the book has been produced recently, the articles (originally in English) which form the core of the book, were first published in German under the title *Der Kosmische und die Indus Kulture*.

After a prolonged study of the Indus script, the author could formulate certain basic structural rules for this script, which would assist readers in understanding his interpretations. The ten chapters deal with *Ṛg Vedic* hymns; Paśupati (Lord of Beasts) and certain other anthropomorphic motifs; the episode of Purūravas and Uṛvaśi; and certain myths referred to in the Gilgamesh. There is a chapter on chess as a cosmic design and a chapter for those interested in historical linguistics on the development of the Brāhmī and Tamil scripts.

Dr S R Rao, in an article titled 'New Light on Indus Script and Language', included in *Frontiers of Indus Civilization* (1984), has dealt with the charac-

ters of Harappan and late Harappan scripts. These have been critically examined in the first chapter of the book. Richter-Ushanas concludes that Dr Rao's attempt to decipher the Indus signs as letters cannot be successful, as it does not recognize the symbolic way in which the Indian priests thought, even if the words he constructs from these letters are found in the *Rg Veda*. The author also does not agree with Dr Rao 'to read the Indus signs on the ground of Old Semitic script' (p. 30).

The author has shown that the seal inscriptions confirm that the archaeological remains reveal such things as fire altars and other enclosures built for animal sacrifices at Mohenjo-Daro, Lothal and Kalibangan. Two seals depict a fire god under a pipal tree.

All the ten chapters in this book are full of information and interpretations. The entire book, however, presupposes that the reader has a thorough knowledge of the Indus seals and inscriptions. A person not so knowledgeable about such things may not find it easy to read the book to the last. But for those who are initiated into the mysterious script, the book opens new vistas.

The book is nicely produced. There are copious footnotes, a general index, and an adequate bibliography.

Dr N B Patil

Hon. Director, MM Dr P V Kane Institute
of PG Studies & Research
Asiatic Society, Mumbai

Jainism: An Indian Religion of Salvation. *Helmuth von Glasenapp; trans. Shridhar B. Shrotri.* Motilal Banarsidass. 1999. xvi + 551 pp. Rs 595.

Who is a Jaina? He who conquers his lower self is a true Jaina, because the word Jaina is derived from *ji*, 'to conquer'. One who has conquered himself is a *jina*. External victories and Alexander-like conquests are not of any consequence to a Jaina because one of the fundamental tenets of Jainism is that non-violence in thought, word and deed is an essential practice of every individual. Therefore the Jaina strives to overcome his base passions, and to release his self (*jiva*) from the hold of karma and the world. The twenty-four *tirthankaras* of the Jaina faith, of whom the last one was the great Mahavira, were all *jinas*.

For over thousands of years, this grand religion has been influencing the hearts of countless souls all over the world. In recent times, the Anuvrat movement, initiated by Acharya Tulsi, has gained immense popularity. The reason for the success of Jainism is the pious approach to life it teaches, and

the apparently uncompromising but easy approach to spirituality it advocates. A pre-eminently monastic faith, Jainism has its *digambaras* and *śvetāmbaras* striving to attain *kaivalya* or liberation from the hold of transmigratory existence.

Jainism, a translation from the original German by Shridhar B Shrotri, is an excellent introduction to the religion, philosophy, ethics, spirituality and culture of the Jaina faith. There are beautiful photographs in this book along with a detailed Index at the end. The author has taken great pains to introduce Jainism to Europe. The translation is exceedingly good, thanks to Sri Shrotri's devotional exercise.

We thank the publishers for their thoughtful publication. This book is an imperative if you want to enter into the depths of Jaina thought.

A Monk

The Path of Light. *Roy Eugene Davis.* Motilal Banarsidass. 1999. 155 pp. Rs 95.

The Path of Light explicates the philosophical principles and guidelines to Self- and God-realization. The subtitle, *A Guide to 21st Century Discipleship and Spiritual Practice in the Kriya Yoga Tradition*, reiterates the basic premises of this book. Kriyas are intentional actions that impede, restrict and obliterate mental and physical conditions that thwart or distort awareness. The removal of these conditions brings about the restoration of awareness to its original, natural state of wholeness. The author refers to it as 'the path of light' because kriya yoga purifies the mind and ego, clarifies awareness, attunes one with nature, increases receptivity to grace, and accelerates spiritual awakening that culminates in the illumination of spiritual consciousness (p. 13). Kriya yoga is a mode of disciplined behaviour that leads to Self-realization. The true essence or reality of the soul is the Self, and since the soul cannot exist independently of God, Self-realization leads to God-realization within one's Self. This transcendent state of awareness can be realized by contemplating on the true nature of the Self. Kriya yoga can be looked upon as a form of mental therapy that can lead to a harmonious relationship between one's Self and the universe.

The book begins with an epigraph from Paramahansa Yogananda: 'Read a little. Meditate more. Think about God all the time.' The book is divided into four sections. Part One deals with the basic teaching, lifestyle guidelines, spiritual practices, initiation and discipleship, and meditation routines of kriya yoga. Part Two deals with the yoga sutras. Part Three gives an introduction to the *Bhagavad-gita*, and Part Four traces the lineage of the great teachers of the kriya yoga tradition. It is followed

by an excellent and informative Glossary.

This book is useful and relevant in the context of the spiritual distress faced by modern civilization. A significant factor is that the ancient philosophy of India contributed more to the spiritual development of man than any of the panaceas offered by the psychologists, psychiatrists and doctors of today. In a lucid and coherent manner, Roy Eugene Davis delves into this time-tested spiritual practice of kriya yoga that has been taught for thousands of years by enlightened sages and seers. In a logical and methodical manner the book combines theory with practice. By explicating the virtues of the *Bhagavadgita* the author exhorts the reader to contemplate on it as a mode of arriving at one's innate spirituality. This book is indeed an asset to anyone in quest of spiritual peace.

Dr Rama Nair

Associate Professor of English
Osmania University, Hyderabad

Jaina System of Education. *Debendra Chandra Dasgupta*. Motilal Banarsidass. 1999 (reprint). xix + 134 pp. Rs 200.

Any religion which has strong roots in tradition or in a particular civilization has its own approach to Reality, philosophy, education, art, culture, and so on. When the religion is started by a founder, as is the case with most of the recent religions, there is, initially, only a strong urge to realize the highest goal as propounded by him. For the chief concern of the founder is to make his followers, and the whole world for that matter, free from suffering, misery and the hold of the world. However, as the founder's teachings spread far and wide, it passes through different minds and, as a consequence, there is a horizontal growth in the teachings. There are various additions, many alterations, numerous embellishments, and myths, rituals, etc begin to surround the founder's life. Thus begins a new religion. And this religion will have all the paraphernalia that any religion should possess: mythology, religious theories, controversies, symbols, culture, etc. When a religion develops in this way, there is a need for propagating it. So there are schools and institutions, books and libraries, theorists and researchers, monastics and the laity, quarrels and dissensions, cleavages and breakaway factions. Then there are students who wish to learn. So a system of teaching is developed slowly.

In ancient India there was the tradition of *gurukula*, where the teacher would keep his students in his hermitage and teach them in the ways of life, art, science, etc. This system has been appreciated worldwide and there are attempts in recent times at emulation of this everywhere. Though not pre-

The Life and Times of Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati. *Prof N Nanjunda Sastry*. Lalitha Prakashana, Bangalore. viii + 198 pp. Rs 120.

The effects of holy company are many. If we are fortunate enough to live with a really holy person, we are indeed blessed. If not, the next best thing is to study the lives of such great souls.

Prof Nanjunda Sastry needs no introduction to Kannada-speaking people. He is a distinguished scholar, and translator of rare ability. He specializes in the art of presenting the lives of saints to people at large.

The author brings out the story just as a musician unfolds a raga in all its glory. The content of the book is neatly arranged in fourteen chapters, two exhaustive appendices and a bibliography.

The first few chapters are introductory in nature and describe the time and place in which Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati was born. Especially interesting are the historical details regarding Sringeri.

What set the saint apart was his extraordinary spirituality which was evident even in his boyhood. The holy environs of the Sringeri Math deeply influenced the saint-to-be Narasimha. His rare qualities of head and heart attracted the notice of his future guru Nrisimha Bharati, who encouraged him to give up English education and join the Vedic school run by the Math. Narasimha was in Bangalore specializing in Purva Mimamsa. The pontiff concluded that Narasimha was the fittest person to succeed him and hinted to him to em-

brace the life of a sannyasin.

In 1912 Nrisimha Bharati's health began failing fast and he summoned his protege to Sringeri. But before Narasimha's arrival his guru passed away. Narasimha went through the sannyasa ceremony all the same and assumed the name Chandrasekhara Bharati. In his guru's absence Chandrasekhara Bharati's innate spirituality, deep learning and the consequent spirit of dispassion were his support. After nearly twelve years of seclusion, Chandrasekhara Bharati went on his *digvijaya* tour in 1924.

When he returned to Sringeri, his naturally introspective mind was seized with irrepressible longing for moksha, and he immersed himself in sadhana without giving a thought to the world. Chandrasekhara Bharati was thought mad by the worldly. In due course, to the saint's great relief, a successor was installed to manage the affairs of the Math. From now on his life was a virtual demonstration of the characteristics of a true *sthitaprajna*. He lived an absolutely detached life and was, to use his very words, 'only waiting for the dissolution of the karma-born body.' In the early hours of Mahalaya Amavasya of 1954, he voluntarily gave up his body in the waters of the holy Tungabhadra and attained *mahasamadhi*.

The last few chapters of the book contain interesting anecdotes, tributes from disciples, and the essence of the Swami's instructions. Especially noteworthy is Prof Ramachandra Rao's translation of the saint's teachings. At the end the book lists the works written by Chandrasekhara Bharati.

Our thanks to the author for this a treasure of a book; we look forward to more such inspiring works from his pen.

Swami Satyavidananda
Ramakrishna Math, Madurai

Anubodh: Bhajagovindam and Atma-shatakam. *Charu Jalundhwala*. Published by the author from CAPRI, 9 Manav Mandir Road, Malabar Hill, Mumbai 400006. 44 pp. Rs 30.

Vichara or discrimination between truth and untruth is vital in spiritual life. *Vichara* plays a decisive role in the aspirant's spiritual journey, irrespective of the path he chooses to follow. It is this faculty that gives birth to renunciation, which in turn arouses spiritual longing. Naturally, several treatises have been written in Sanskrit to help sharpen and refine this faculty. *Bhajagovindam* by Sri Sankara occupies a place of pride amongst available literature. His *Atmashatakam* is yet an-

other great composition which extols and glorifies the divine nature of man.

This slender volume is a homely exposition of these two texts. The book is divided into two parts. The first part contains the original Sanskrit text of the two treatises with simple English translation. An exposition of both treatises with ample cross references to other texts like the *Gita* and the *Ram-charitmanas* forms the second part of *Anubodh*. Explanations avoid scholarly disputes, and are quite simple, clear and appealing. This has enriched the spiritual value of the book. For instance, Mrs Jalundhwala asks, 'Why is "worship Govinda" repeated thrice at the end of each stanza of *Bhajagovindam*?' and answers: 'The sadhaka is reminded to worship the Lord with his body, mind and soul.'

Anubodh is yet another useful addition to the existing literature on Sankara.

Swami Atmashradhananda
Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore

Shri Sai Satcharita. *trans. Indira Kher*. Sterling Publishers, A-59 Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110020. 1999. xx + 883 pp. Rs 300.

This book—in verse form—is based on the life and teachings of Shirdi Sai Baba, and is an English translation of the Marathi original, written by Govind R Dabholkar and published in 1929. Sri Dabholkar conceived the idea of writing this book during Baba's lifetime, and received his blessings to record incidents and facts about him. This book has 53 chapters comprising more than 9000 verses. It places before the readers the entire subject matter of the original admirably well, facilitating a deeper understanding of Baba.

Shri Sai Satcharita is a bible for Sai Baba's devotees in every sense of the word. The devotees would be immensely pleased to go through the book, as it would reinforce their faith in him as a great healer. The book has many attractions. It has one chapter devoted to the *Isa Upanishad*, which is considered a gem among the principal Upanishads. Another chapter is about the greatness of the guru, and yet another on the *Bhagavadgita's* teaching on how to approach the guru. The notes at the end of each chapter enhance the translation's clarity.

Ms Kher is a retired professor of English, and herself an ardent devotee of Baba. She deserves our praise for her meticulous translation of the voluminous original work.

Lt Col R K Langar
Shastri Nagar, Jammu

❧ Reports ❧

Inaugurated. The three-storey Centenary Memorial Swami Akhandananda Bhavan at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi, by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 1 January. The building is an extension of the high school run by the Ashrama.

Visited. Mr K V Thomas, Minister for Tourism, Government of Kerala; Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady, on 5 January.

Dedicated. A new prayer hall at Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, Porbandar, by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj; on 9 January.

Visited. Mr Rima Taipodia, Minister for Home Affairs, Government of Arunachal Pradesh; Ramakrishna Mission, Along, on 9 January. He opened the annual celebrations of the centre.

Inaugurated. The newly built Sri Sarada Vidya Bhavan at the boys' higher secondary school run by Ramakrishna Mission, Chengalpattu, by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; on 10 January.

Opened. A new dormitory at Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai, by Swami Smarananandaji; on 11 January.

Opened. A newly constructed library building at the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, Porbandar, by Sri Jagmohan, Minister for Tourism, Government of India; on 12 January. Dr Vallabhbhai Kathiria, Minister for Heavy Industries, Government of India, released the souvenir brought out on the occasion.

Opened. The newly built memorial hall at Ramakrishna Math, Beni Pal Udyan, Sinthi, Kolkata, by Swami Smarananandaji; on 19 January.

Organized. A seven-day national integration camp by Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad, at its Magh Mela compound; from 20 to 26 January. Ms Uma Bharati, Minister for Sports,

Government of India, inaugurated the camp.

Inaugurated. A new prayer hall at the school run by Ramakrishna Mission, Kamarpukur, and a new guest house at the centre, by Swami Smarananandaji; on 23 January.

Laid. Foundation stone for the proposed dining hall for devotees at Matri Mandir, Jayrambati, by Swami Smarananandaji; on 25 January.

Organized. A three-day educational exhibition by Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir, Belur, on the occasion of its diamond jubilee (1941-2001); from 22 to 24 January. Sri Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal, inaugurated the exhibition, and Sri Satya Sadhan Chakraborty, Minister for Higher Education, Government of West Bengal, released the diamond jubilee issue of the college annual *Vidyamandir Patrika*.

Conducted. A national-level UGC-sponsored seminar on '100 Years of Quantum Theory', by Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir, Belur, on 29 and 30 January. Besides many teachers from various colleges and universities, Dr Hari Gautam, Chairperson, UGC, and some outstanding researchers attended the seminar.

Secured. First position by a student of Vivekananda Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math, in the Uttara Madhyama (equivalent to higher secondary) examination conducted by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansathan, New Delhi. He was awarded a gold medal and a citation.

Secured. First position secured by a student of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, at the all-India secondary school examination conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi.

Organized. A medical relief camp by Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters in collaboration with its Seva Pratishthan, Sarisha and Manasadwip centres, at Sagar Island; during Makara Sankranti in January. Over 3000 patients were treated and 200 blankets and assorted garments were distributed among poor pilgrims.